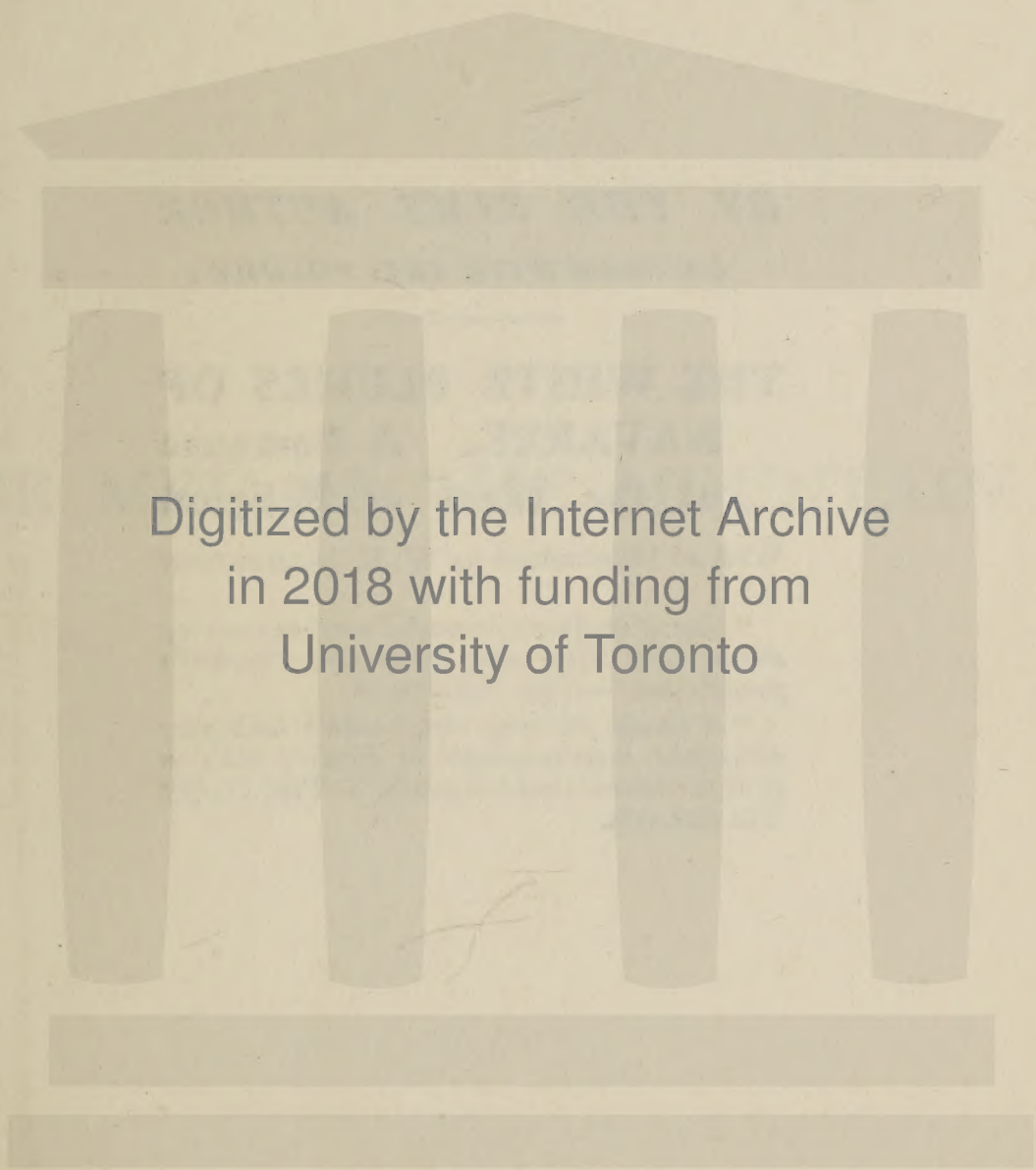
THE MEN OF THE MOUNTAIN

S. R. CROCKETT



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/menofmountain00croc_0

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

THE WHITE PLUMES OF NAVARRE. A Romance of the Wars of Religion

With 16 Illustrations by W. H. MARGETSON

"*One of the most powerful and engrossing stories that have come from Mr. Crockett's prolific pen.*"—THE SCOTSMAN.

"*A lively, stirring story, which will give abundant entertainment to readers with a taste for adventurous romance.*"—THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.

THE MEN OF THE MOUNTAIN

'HE SHALL *NOT* ESCAPE,' SHE CRIED.

THE MEN OF THE MOUNTAIN

BY

S. R. CROCKETT

Author of 'The White Plumes of Navarre,' 'The Lilac Sunbonnet' 'The Raiders,' etc.

With Illustrations by Harold Copping

WILLIAM BRIGGS

BOOKSELLERS' ROW, TORONTO

1909

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW ON THE WALL 1

CHAPTER II.

THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN 10

CHAPTER III.

LA PETITE FLORE 22

CHAPTER IV.

COUNCIL OF REVISION 29

CHAPTER V.

JONATHAN AND HIS DAVID 37

CHAPTER VI.

A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH 45

CHAPTER VII.

SISTER NOÉLIE 51

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT PEACE, BUT A SWORD 54

Contents

PAGE

CHAPTER IX.

THE ELDER BROTHER WHO WOULD NOT COME IN .. 63

CHAPTER X.

AN ENEMY WITHIN THE GATE 69

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEFENCE OF THE EAST WING 79

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW THAT WALKETH IN DARKNESS 90

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMMANDANT 99

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVENING SACRIFICE 112

CHAPTER XV.

BRESLIN THE SMITH 121

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WRATH OF MAN 127

CHAPTER XVII.

CROSS-EXAMINATION 137

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN 145

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PASTOR'S DAY 155

Contents

PAGE

CHAPTER XX.

WITHOUT GOD AND WITHOUT HOPE 166

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RED REVOLT 174

CHAPTER XXII.

MOTHER AND SON 183

CHAPTER XXIII.

"PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF" 193

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRAIL OF THE WILD CAT 199

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SEARCH 213

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE POST-OFFICE OF VERCEL-ADAM 219

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ADVENTURES OF A TRAITOR 227

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT CONFESSION 235

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LITTLE SCHOOLMISTRESS CALLS UP HER RESERVES 243

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FIRE OF PURIFYING 254

Contents

PAGE

CHAPTER XXXI.

"And God said, Let there be Light!" 264

CHAPTER XXXII.

He shall Restore Fourfold 271

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A Sweet Drop in the Bitter 278

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Bitter Cup 284

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Oh, You Man!" 292

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Not Long A-doing" 29,

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Black Leo's Waygoing 306

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"And there was Light!" 312

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"HE SHALL *NOT* ESCAPE," SHE CRIED . . *Frontispiece*

Facing page

HIS HANDS WERE WIDE APART AND MADE THE SHAPE OF A CROSS, FOR HIS TIME WAS SHORT . . 6

HE DID IT SO REVERENTLY THAT HIS COMPANION TURNED UPON HIM WITH A TWINKLE . . . 12

"AHA, WE HAVE SCENTED YOU OUT, OLD FOX!" . . 20

"THIS IS THE IDEA OF THE GOVERNMENT!" . . 32

"MY MOTHER'S HOUSE—THE FARM OF VILLARS CHAUMONT," HE EXPLAINED 40

HIS EYE GLINTING ALONG THE TUBE OF HIS REVOLVER 52

THE YOUNG MAN REMAINED FIXED DURING THE SERVICE 64

"BACK THERE," HE SHOUTED, "WE MUST FINISH OUR GERMAN IN SOME OTHER WAY 82

IN A LOW, THRILLING VOICE, HE BEGAN TO READ OUT THE PSALM 118

"I PRAYED FOR A MAN WHO BROUGHT HIS FATHER'S GREY HAIRS IN SORROW TO THE GRAVE" . . 152

"LET ME TOUCH YOU—A BLIND WOMAN'S HANDS ARE HER EYES" 162

"AND YOU HAVE TO SAY—WHAT?" DEMANDED THE ADVOCATE-BUSHWHACKER 172

THERE WITHIN A DOZEN YARDS OF HIM WAS BLACK LEO 202

"BE BROTHERS ONE TO THE OTHER, BECAUSE I, NOÉLIE, AM YOUR SISTER". 226

HALED INCONTINENT ACROSS THE YARD BY THE ARM. 294

THE MEN OF THE MOUNTAIN

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW ON THE WALL

THE white wall of a cottage house, with the low sun of one of January's latest mornings red upon it! In the midst, where the long, lime-washed wall of the garden began, the rosy glare was suddenly cut into by the silhouette of a man. He was dressed in frayed black frock-coat and trousers. His hands were behind his back, and his stringy clerical tie—washed to a ribbon—hung dolorously down upon his open vest. But the man was not afraid, although that might well have been excused him, seeing that he was looking into the muzzles of a firing-party of the Von Hartmann's famous Pomeranians. To be exact, this was the Pastor David Alix of the Evangelical Church of Geneva, long-time domiciled in France, and now in deadly peril of his life at the hands of the German invader.

Yet he did not look like a "bush-whacker." He was unarmed. Nevertheless he had been caught along with a comrade who carried a rifle, but no uniform. The companion was that heap of tumbled rags on the rubbish-heap at the stable end. It was

the early morning on a day of January of the French Year Terrible—that is, 1871. The Jura Hills were all white with snow as far as one could see, and beneath this hamlet of Mouthe the young Doubs gurgled and chafed under its ice mantle.

David Alix was to die. The General had said so. There had been too much shooting of his men from behind stone heaps gathered off the Jurassic fields, sudden spurts of fire out of the clumps of willow along the Doubs, and along the small tributary burns which ray out from it like the backbones of a fish, wimpling and chuckling to themselves till the sound is lost among the green rounded breasts of the mountains. These now are all delicate and soft as David Alix, who knows them so well, looks his last upon them. Or rather, to his eyes they are tinted with red. A kind of rosy bloom lies on their sides and slopes where the morning sun is glinting level along them. Yet the shadows they throw one upon the other are blue. The shadow of the little white-washed house is a deeper blue, though not so deep as that of the uniform of the firing-party of Trossel's Colberg regiment of Grenadiers. Tall, angry men they are, for it is their sentries who have been "sniped" and their details cut up. Old Von Hartmann, Major-General of the Third, has come down on purpose himself to see into things. And twenty minutes ago he had fallen into such an anger at the sight of the *franc-tireur* and his companion—the slim man clad in black—that he himself had ordered the immediate shooting of the man with the rifle out of hand, and even presided at the drumhead court-

martial upon David Alix. As Von Hartmann spoke no French in any intelligible fashion, and understood still less of that language when spoken, the trial of David Alix was very summary indeed.

There were indeed among the officers several who could have enlightened Von Hartmann upon many things, had not the chief been in such a grunting, bull-dog fury that it was not safe for even his own adjutant to cross him.

So David Alix was to die—at the age of thirty. All of them had been spent in doing God service, ever since his mother had taught him his texts in the Genevan version, seated down on the logs by the lakeside—logs all peeled and scratched by being hurled into the rock-spotted foam of the Drance. What had these tall Pomeranians against him? He did not understand. They had turned his pockets out—the deep tail-coat pockets of a travelling pastor. But there was nothing there except a slim, limp, morocco-bound Bible of Segond's version, which he had saved up to buy when, a poor student at the New College of Edinburgh, he could ill afford the price. There was also much bread, in little, hard, round loaves, which his mother had made—a whole provision of them indeed—and, what they looked at longest and most severely, a paper with a list of names neatly written out in the Pastor's own hand.

In all this to David Alix there seemed nothing worthy of death. Nor with a more proven brigade would there have been—say one of Unser Fritz's "blooded" regiments, which had fought right through from Worth to the "crowning mercy" of Paris. But

these were fresh from the Baltic edges. They had marched long distances. They had participated in none of the great victories, gained no medals, been mentioned in no despatches, and yet ever since they entered the hills their flanks had been scourged with dropping fire. It was certainly trying—a long-range bullet spatting into the column, and lo! a lad whose mother was waiting for a letter from him, fell forward with a suddenly whitened face among the trampled snow.

These things had told against David Alix. Furthermore, the little hard loaves with which his pockets were stuffed had, in the opinion of the Trossel's Grenadiers, been destined to feed and sustain the "bush-whackers" who, at eve and morn, slew their comrades! "*David Alix, Pasteur*"—a likely story! Had he not the roll of a whole company of murderers, or their abettors, in his pocket?

And it is certain that neither his position as an ex-citizen of Geneva, nor the Bible bought in St. Andrew's Square, would have saved him had he not fallen on his knees, and with his hands clasped prayed for the ignorant men who, without reason, were sending him out of life; and, because they knew not what they did, breaking his old mother's heart away down yonder by Le Lochle.

David Alix had no fear of death for its own sake. He commended his mother to God and his soul to the Saviour. He had often preached to his people that in the Day of the Shadowed Valley, neither he nor they should be forsaken. And now, when that day was come, lo, it was so! Then he rose up to

his feet, and, like his Huguenot ancestors who had fled Genevawards from the "dragonnades," he betook himself to sing his death-psalm. It says something for the mark that the College-on-the-Mound (in the town of Edinburgh) sets upon her men, that now in his hour the foreigner, David Alix, who had sat upon her benches but three short winter sessions, sent out clear and strong the morning song with which, in that time, the day of study was opened :

"God is our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid ;
Therefore, although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid."

Now a little way up the street of the village of Mouthe, in a cottage with its gable to the narrow street of trampled snow and mud, a weary chaplain of King William of Prussia's army was trying to get some broken slumber among the rattling of drums and the clear singing of the clarions. Hermann Falk was huge in person, rubicund in feature, but trampling and overbearing in manner to men and officers alike. But his heart was strong, and the men loved him because it was reported in the regiment that he was the only man who dared confront the angers of the Colonel. Nay, even the tough old General Von Hartmann had been known to give the black skirts and muslin bands of his emphatic chaplain a wide berth. At the first sound of the singing Military Chaplain Hermann Falk turned wrathfully in his bed, grumbling that since it was by no means the ninth hour of the day, Trossel should have looked better

after his "rascaldom of Pomeranians." But the moment afterwards something familiar came through the coverlet which was drawn about the ears of the Chaplain of the Grenadiers.

It seemed suddenly as if he were in a far city. It was the winter season. The black tangled streets were slippery and crisp with snow. The pents of the houses discharged rumbles of half-melted snow on his head. Strange, too, how clearly he saw the wide, bleak courtyard of the old college, the broad steps which led to the assembly hall, the groups about the fire in the dining hall—seniors they mostly—and at the opening of the morning class the voices of men—of many young men—singing the Luther's hymn of Scotland.

He too had passed that way, and the ancient melody had grown part of him—so much so that his grenadiers, smiling all across their broad Pomeranian faces, were wont to say, "There goes Old Head-and-Shoulders at his Scots again! Best look to your cartridges, lads! There will be warm work close ahead of us, I wager!"

The Military Chaplain leaped from his bed, rapidly passed his cloak of office about him, and was out in the street before David Alix had finished his psalm. Chaplain Falk made a strange figure in the clearness of an Alpine morning—his rough shock of uncombed locks, all cow-licks and rebellious tufts, his black-braided trousers only half covered by the fluttering Genevan gown in which he had, the evening before, read the service for the troops to whom it was his duty to speak of God and Fatherland.

"*Be still and know that I am God!*"—so came the

HIS HANDS WERE WIDE APART AND MADE THE SHAPE OF A CROSS,
FOR HIS TIME WAS SHORT.

words to his ears. He saw the French pastor now, standing a yard or so in front of the wall. His hands were wide apart, and made the shape of a cross on the whitewashed wall behind him, for his time was short. Soon, very soon, would he know who indeed was God. For Von Hartmann, who, like the stout old Gallio that he was, cared for none of these things, had just given the command to "take aim."

Into the six yards between the *peloton* of execution and the Man-about-to-Die, Military Chaplain Hermann Falk precipitated himself with a rush and a flutter of ecclesiastical silk.

"Ground arms!" he commanded, under the very moustache of the astonished General.

"For a pin's head," growled fierce old Von Hartmann, "I would stick you up beside him! Men, do your duty!"

"Shoot, rascals, if you dare!" cried the Chaplain, standing close in front of David Alix, and with a dexterous cast, enveloping him in the ample folds of his Neurenberg gown.

"I dare you," he cried. "Even in this world you dare not shoot down the King's own chaplain—and his Majesty thanking God every day for the assistance of the God of battles! As for your own future chances, they could not well be worse, considering the set of Wendish heathens that you are! But I excommunicate for ever any man who moves, till I have spoken with this singer of the songs of Zion! If I mistake not he is an old friend of mine."

Perhaps it would not have succeeded with any other corps than the Second Pomeranians. But they had

heard the roar of the Baltic. They had seen the white horses ride past Isle Rügen, and as to old Von Hartmann, the name of King William daunted him as nothing else on earth could.

So, smothering a hearty curse at the Chaplain's untimely interference, but recognising that for the moment he had better give in with what air of grace was possible to him, he growled out, "Well, Herr Regimental Chaplain, since you care so little for the lives of your parishioners as to let them be shot down by rascals such as this, let us see what your reverend wisdom will make of him!"

"Aye, and gladly, Major-General," answered Falk, shaking his rugged head. "But first call off these good fellows, who are weary with so long holding their needle-guns at the 'present,' and give me your word that you will do nothing against this man without a proper trial."

"There is no more time for that," grumbled the commander; "speak to him—let us hear what he has to say! You and I know each other—we will judge the case together—old Saul-among-the-People!"

And by that all the command knew that the General had improved vastly in humour, and that, unless his mood changed again, the Frenchman stood reprieved.

"Where is the evidence of his guilt?" demanded Chaplain Falk. "Sergeant-Major Schram, what was found upon him?"

"That, and that!" said the automaton, indicating the pieces of conviction, spread out on the ground, with the point of his boot.

The Shadow on the Wall

"Bread, a paper, and a Bible! You would shoot a man for that—heathens, Wends, idolaters, witch-folk! Does a man come out to kill or to give life, thus armed? See, you—you fools! Bread for the body, the Word of God for the soul! And the paper! Let us see, let us see! Written in English, is it? Well, I was not three years in Edinburgh College for nothing!"

And this is what he read out in the clear high tones which he used at the evening prayer, when all the men stood with bowed and uncovered heads:

"*List of poor widows and sick folk in the commune of Mouthe to whom bread is to be taken*

First, Madame Gilberte, Mas des Marais.
Second, old Jean Drujon, at the Pont du Doubs."

And so on to the bottom. He did not spare them one single name, and at the end he took the hand of Pastor David Alix, true shepherd of his flock, and crying aloud, "Now shoot him if you dare!" he strode off to his lodging with his new-recovered friend. He did not so much as glance at the General, who sat his horse, smiling a little, and gnawing his grey moustache. He only cried out to the sergeant-major:

"Schram, bring the bread to my room. I am a little short this morning, myself! My friend David will perhaps add me to his list of the hungry and the needy in this commune of Mouthe!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN

HERMANN FALK of Isle Rügen, late chaplain in the Altkirch of Berlin, and sometime student at the Edinburgh College-on-the-Mound, conveyed his former friend and con-disciple to his lodging, where at the door his landlady, Madame Virginie, angular and gaunt, awaited with more than her natural disfavour the return of her particular barbarian. But when she saw behind her guest the tall figure of Pastor David Alix, Madame Virginie sank quickly upon one knee. She had dwelt all her life among Roman Catholics. So, though a Protestant, she would gladly have kissed the hand of her minister, and asked for his blessing.

Specially now was his fame of good odour among all mothers of families in the commune of Mouthe, because Madame, his mother, out of her scanty store, the provision she had made for the winter and spring, was supplying half the population of the war-swept communes, from Mouthe to Le Lochle, with the bread which is the ultimate staff of life.

The Germans had done their best. No war, on the whole, had ever been more cleanly conducted, but an

army must find provision as the first necessity of its being. Moreover, Bourbaki's army had been over the ground before, and what the locusts of France had spared, it was now the turn of the German canker-worm to eat. Even on the Swiss side the folk of the Jura were in a great trouble, and the distress would have been far worse but for David Alix and his mother. Madame Alix was called "the Old," not because she was old in years or that her natural strength had abated, but in anticipation of David's taking to himself a wife. She was a forceful, emphatic, face-to-the-foe woman, full of quick angers and as sudden contritions. It was to the produce of her fine farm, just over the frontier of Switzerland, that the Upper Valley of the Doubs owed its escape from starvation. And among these one of the most grateful was Madame Virginie Granier of Mouthe, at present the unwilling hostess of the heathen man who called himself a pastor, and yet without shame smoked a long pipe in bed!

It was no wonder then that Virginie Granier, the mother of six children and the protector of an invalid husband, sank on her knees before Pastor Alix—though, be it said, perhaps as much for the sake of his mother's loaves of good wheaten bread, her oil, and her wine, as because of his sacred office and renown as a preacher.

But David Alix, used to such homage, simply raised one hand in the air, and in the apostolic manner called for a blessing to be upon that house. He did it so reverently that his companion turned upon him with a twinkle.

"Friend David," he said, "you would never do for an army chaplain. I have to bully my Pomeranians to make them move one step heavenward, and even so, it is mostly with kicks that I can convince them, the raw-boned Baltic mules that they are!"

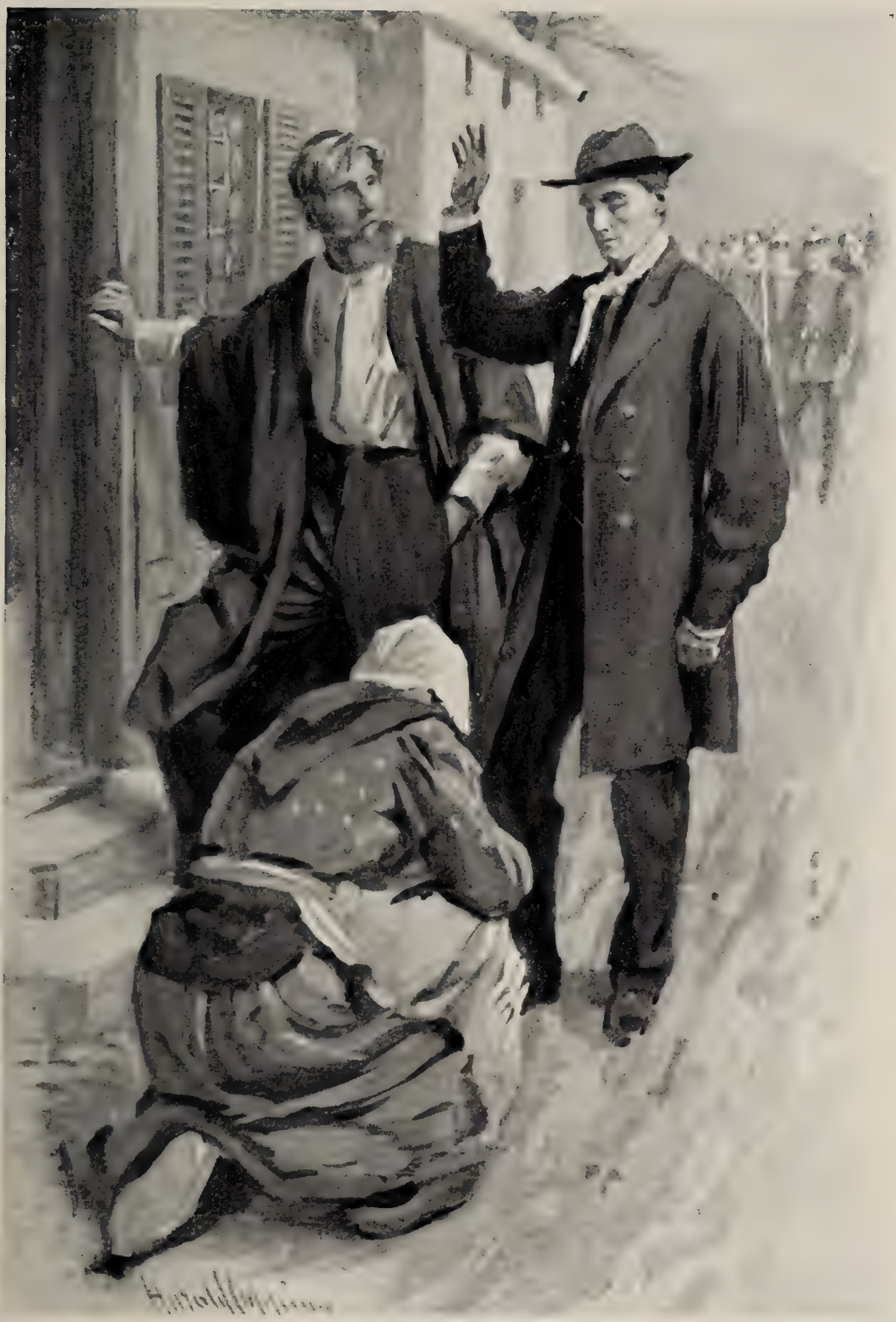
"Then," said David, smiling, "if I understand you, they do not, like new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word?"

"Beer suits them better," cried the Military Chaplain. "The rascals would sell their Wendish souls for beer, and now they are in the vilest of tempers because they cannot get it."

He thought a moment, and then added, with a quick flash of the eye, "And you, my David, came near to suffering martyrdom all for that! John the Baptist because of Salome, Stephen because of the libertines, your own Calvinist folk because they thought differently from emperor and king! But you—merely because old Von Hartmann and Trossel had been three weeks without beer!"

They went up into the sleeping-room of the Chaplain, where the bed-clothes lay just where he had tossed them when he heard the noise of the psalm-singing without. The sergeant followed with the bread and a request from the colonel that if one or two small loaves could be spared for the mess, the officers would be grateful.

"If they had shot you, they would have had them all, the pigs!" cried their chaplain; "but take them these three with the compliments of my friend, Pastor David Alix, of Geneva! Mind you say 'of Geneva.'"



HE DID IT SO REVERENTLY THAT HIS COMPANION TURNED UPON HIM WITH A TWINKLE.

"Better say 'of his mother,'" said the son with humility.

"Aye, say—with the compliments of the woman whom, but for their chaplain, they would have made childless! The instinct is good. That may perhaps touch them if anything will, hogs of the sty!"

Sergeant-Major Schram touched his cap woodenly, brought his heels together with a sharp click, and demanded, "Am I to call the gentlemen these names to their face?"

"Certainly, and with *my* compliments! Say that I, Army Chaplain Hermann Falk, stand ready to prove my words. I was not five years *maître d'armes* in my time for nothing. 'Hogs of the sty'—remember, Schram—that is, if no private is within hearing!"

Sergeant Schram saluted grimly, and went out with his usual wooden click of boot heels. Needless to say, he understood his stormy chaplain excellently, and had not the least intention of risking his stripes by delivering any such message. But to the colonel he simply said, in delivering the loaves, "With the compliments of the mother of Pastor David Alix, late of Geneva, and a college comrade of Herr Chaplain Falk!"

At this the officers looked at each other rather shamefacedly. Here were the coals of fire with a vengeance. But they were genuinely grateful for the loaves. The country had been swept clean of everything eatable, and, worse still in the estimation of these thirsty-throated Wends, of everything drinkable.

Each glided his hand into his pocket, and scribbling

hastily a card of thanks, gave it to Schram to carry back to their late prisoner and present benefactor.

Then they looked at one another, and Colonel Trossel said, smiling grimly, "This Colberg regiment will hear some good plain-spoken German next sermon time, I will wager."

His subordinates nodded their heads, and seemed to relish the prospect but little. But their chief comforted them. "Never mind, lads; after all, he is one of us, and anything he can say to us will be babe's sweetstuff to what he gave old Von Hartmann in the face of the whole regiment."

They laughed discreetly, because it affected their superior officer and divisional general. But they laid away the dressing-down Hartmann had got from Old-Head-and-Shoulders deep in their hearts, to be recounted when, in far-off Rügen or Pommern, they fought their battles over again.

His sudden irruption, his intervention, as brusque and even brutal as it had been successful, his saving of their pastor's life, caused the Chaplain to rise high in the estimation of the few inhabitants, mostly women, who still remained in the village of Mouthe on the Upper Doubs. The men were at the war—the younger in the line or shut up in Germany, a few in Paris. The elders, fathers of families and ancient braves of the war of Italy and of the Crimea, were "Moblots," training, marching, and fighting with the best, but as regularly going down before the disciplined soldiership of their foes.

What better could they do? From the beginning hardly a gleam of hope, much less of victory, had

cheered them. They were hopeless and starving. Yet they fought on—nay, would have continued to fight, even when their chiefs knew that the hour for surrender had struck.

As for the younger men and growing boys of the hill district occupied by the Germans during these last days of the war, it was not a safe question to ask concerning them. Mostly a rusty rifle of some antique and forgotten pattern had disappeared at the time when Jean or Louis, or the schoolboy Henri (as they say in Corsica), "took to the *makis*." The wilderness had swallowed them up. But none the less, there would come a scratch with a finger-nail at the window when all was safe and still. In a minute or two the door at the back would yawn slightly, mother or sister standing with palpitating hearts behind it. Then, with socks drawn over his boots the *franc-tireur* would slip in, a desperate and romantic prodigal, to be fed and wept over with smothered sobs.

Mostly, however, the Germans now kept such good watch that entrance into the villages was seldom attempted. Provisions had therefore to be smuggled out, and the bearer of aid to the "bush-whacker" was liable to share the same fate as these unlicensed sharpshooters, whose crime was that they wore no uniform and made war each on his own private account against the invaders of his country.

Well-nigh had David Alix shared this fate, though he had done nothing, except lay aside for a time his office that he might serve tables.

Madame Virginie Granier brought out of her secret

hoards such a breakfast as no German in the Juras had seen for months—an omelette made with eggs laid away in cinders, toasted bread fried with bacon and chips of potatoes—precious beyond gold—sausages, white bread, and a bottle of excellent Burgundy. Madame Virginie bustled about and enjoyed her triumph. The six children peeped shyly out of corners, or were stepped upon—and cuffed—as their mother hurried to and fro with the dishes.

"I suppose," said the Chaplain of the Colberg Grenadiers, "that you have not this good and well-provided lady on your list of poor to be assisted?"

They were speaking in English, to which, in memory of old times, they had reverted instinctively as a means of communication—also, perhaps, that there might be no danger of their being overheard. For answer David Alix threw the paper across to his ancient friend and fellow-student of the Mound. The name of Madame Virginie Granier stood high on the list. The Military Chaplain looked his astonishment.

"I am speaking now to my ancient comrade, not to a German officer!" said David Alix, with one of his rare sweet smiles. "These are the secrets of the prison house. That in which you have shut us up," David explained. "This food we are eating is Madame Virginie's last reserve—the *ban* and *arrière ban* of her hidden stores. She has six children to feed. There is no work in the country. The fields have long ago been swept clear of grain, chiefly for fodder for the cavalry horses. As for these things," he added, as he toyed with his fork—with its fellow in the hands of

the Military Chaplain, the pride of the house and unequalled in all Mouthe—"I warrant that the hen which laid these eggs cackled on my mother's farm at Chaumont, just across the frontier yonder. And the sausage, the preserved meats—all save perhaps the wine, came from Switzerland by my mother's private underground railway."

"Which, I presume, means you, Master David?" asked the Military Chaplain with a flavour of his ordinary roughness.

The gentle pastor of Geneva shook his head.

"No," he said. "I am only the open dispenser of daily bread. It is my mother whose deeds are those of a secret and mysterious providence. You do not know my mother. You must come and see her."

"Heaven and the bones of Charlemagne forbid!" cried the Chaplain of the Colberg Grenadiers. "What! And bring Von Bergmann and all the hordes of the Baltic down upon you!"

"It matters but little to my mother here. She lives across the frontier. In France she has no more than a few kilos of wheaten flour ready to mix with the maize for to-morrow's loaves. They are fresh, my mother's 'gendarmes' hats'—as they call the little round loaves here—but also the stomachs are so famine-ridden that a doctor could not find one case of indigestion in a twelvemonth."

"Aha," quoth the Chaplain, and inclined his ear, smiling kindly, "a wise woman, the lady your mother! She knows the value of an advanced post, right in the middle of affairs, but her headquarters is under the protection of another power."

"Of all the powers," said the Pastor of the Jura, gently triumphant, "the King of Prussia included."

The Military Chaplain raised his glass, as at a toast, when the name of his King fell from the Pastor's lips.

"Your mother grows such wine as this?" he said, perhaps to change the subject, "and yet you drink only water."

"I am no man to dictate to another," the Pastor answered. "For me, I was brought up in a country where every peasant has his little vineyard, as in the Bible, and no man is the worse for it. But I make the slight sacrifice to my office, and I am content."

The Military Chaplain shook his head at him reproachfully.

"Take care, David," he said; "this water-drinking is a habit which, if not checked in time, may grow upon you. How can you tell where it will end? Think well, my David! I am sure from your looks that I have an ally in your mother. Come now, how often has she quoted to you that text which relates to the state of Timothy's stomach?"

"Till I am sick of hearing it," said the Pastor, laughing.

"Aha, good David, have I so nearly hit the mark? Your mother pleases me. She has more sense of the needs of men than you, her only son. How would it be with you, think you, if you were made Military Chaplain of Colberg's Regiment? And where would your influence be with these wild Wends of mine if you were afraid of an honest *chopine* of the red, or to take down in your turn, as it is served out, a mug

of the right Stettin brew, laced with *schnapps* to keep out the cold?"

David put out his hand to touch his friend's. He felt that it was not the time for discussion, even concerning Timothy's stomach, with the man who, a bare hour ago, had saved his life.

"Your Switzer was ever a lusty drinker," the Military Chaplain continued, unwilling to have the dispute thus closed—for like all his kind he loved the friendly strife of tongues.

David Alix smiled a little sadly, and then said, "I am no more a Swiss. I have been naturalised a Frenchman for a good half-dozen years."

At this declaration the Chaplain of Trossel's Colbergers turned pale even under his full coating of tan.

"Then, lad," he said, "a while ago you were nearer finding out all about it from Timothy himself than if you had fought twenty pitched battles. But what a great lie I told the General. If he had known you were no Switzer, I doubt not that old Von Hartmann would have plastered us both to the wall with a score of rifle bullets through our vitals. Aye, and may yet, unless your conscience is more pliable on the matter of Ananias than on that of Paul and Timothy!"

"I can be silent with any man!" said the Pastor.

And at that moment there came the heavy pounding of gun-butts upon the door which Madame Virginie had prudently closed during the repast of these two reverend men, her guests.

"Open there—open, Herr Chaplain!" cried a voice in rough German of the utmost North—"General's orders!"

"Hang him up in his own sword-belt—let him wait, David. I forbid you to open the door!"

The Military Chaplain was very busy doing some very rapid and intricate conjuring. David Alix, who naturally did not understand the German into which his guest had relapsed, threw open the door. Half-a-dozen officers of the staff precipitated themselves into the room, laughing and crying out, "Aha, we have scented you out, old fox! You palm off dry bread on us, and villainously little of that! And we find you feeding with this Genevan 'Pfaff'! Here are some of the loaves left. Break one open, and I will wager we shall find a roast duck or a bottle of wine snug within. The Colbergers have told us tales of their chaplain."

"So," cried Hermann Falk. "Well, you will hear other tales as soon as I have seen the King—breaking in thus upon one whom his Majesty has deigned to call his friend—aye, even in despatches to the well-beloved, nobly-born Queen!" Meanwhile David Alix, returned from the door, had been gazing at the table in amazement. Not only had the bottle of wine been removed, but every vestige of the repast, even the rest of the bacon and sausage. Only a few crumbs of bread appeared beside each plate, and the baffled raiders had to retire ill-contented under a galling cross-fire of scoffs from the Chaplain.

"Perhaps it is the other, the Genevan. Smell his breath, Hertz!" called out Von Tümpling of the Guards, whose father was a general in the Crown Prince's army.

"Useless, my good friends, he is a Calvinist and

'AHA, WE HAVE SCENTED YOU OUT, OLD FOX!'

drinks only water! Come, my pretty lads," continued the fighting Chaplain of the Grenadiers—"come one at a time and smell *my* breath—if you dare! I warrant you it will be the last thing any one of you will care to smell for a long time!"

"He learned the English 'boxing' instead of his Hebrew verbs when he was so long across the water! It is that which makes him so bold!" cried Von Tümpling.

"And good reason therefore, since his Majesty was minded to make me chaplain of a set of Wendish wolves, with scented Bavarian jack-a-dandies buzzing about like cockchafers where they are least wanted! Good day to you and a good appetite. I shall bear your visit in pleasing memory when next I write to the King!"

CHAPTER III.

LA PETITE FLORE

IN a high chamber, simply furnished, La Petite Flore was having her feet washed by a girl still younger than herself. La Petite Flore was so called because, once on a time (and a long time ago) she had been less tall than her mother, the "Grande Flore" of Les Collines. But meantime La Petite had grown great, had sought instruction, had found it, had even passed the Rhine, and lived seven years in Germany as a teacher of her native language. It chanced that there she had fallen among a people rough and difficult, rather than unkindly. So at the first news of the disasters that had befallen her province, she had returned, nominally to engage as a nurse in the military hospitals, but really to join the first bands of *franc-tireurs*, sabre by her side and *chassepot* in hand.

These were now laid on the bed in the corner, and Noélie, the daughter of the house at Villars Chaumont, above Berets in Canton Neuchâtel, kneeled charmingly before her friend, listening to her story, and with light caressing touches of her finger-tips restoring elasticity to the wearied muscles. All her command had been

thrown back upon Switzerland. The "riflemen of Laroche" had been momentarily broken up, and with them their one famous rifle-woman, lieutenant in a corps which had seen a good deal of irregular fighting, but had never been allowed to join issue with the enemy in the company of troops of the line. Accordingly, as was natural, a good deal of hedge-firing, followed by rapid retreats, had made up the record of the first Laroche company of *franc-tireurs*. After La Petite Flore had unbuckled her belt, and laid her provision of cartridges carefully on a shelf, she threw herself on Noélie Villars' bed, eating and talking at once, glad to be with one of her own sex.

"How do you like the war?" said the younger, sitting down by her on the edge of the mattress, and curling up her feet under her to listen comfortably.

"War," said the Little Flore, between two bites of toasted bread dipped in milk, "is war. There is nothing worse in the world. There *can* be nothing worse. You are happy to live here across the frontier, in a land where none can molest you or yours."

"But you are safe *now!*" cried Noélie, with a quick gasp of tenderness, and clasping her friend in her arms.

La Petite Flore looked at the young girl with pity and shook her head.

"I am indeed here with you and safe for the moment, but there are my people over yonder—at Les Collines. Both my father François and Louis Marie, my brother, have been 'out.' Who knows what may be the issue? They made me first lieutenant and I have acted as captain of my company.

But in spite of all I could neither put spirit into our leaders, keep the men from plundering their own people, or shooting stray Germans in the back. This I do not call patriotism—at least, I have not come to that yet. But then, Noélie, I have not yet suffered in my person or my family. As I have read of the Scots, we of the Franche Comté do never fight in earnest till we have seen our own blood flowing red!

"And, in fact, our chiefs did not wish, so far as I could see, to come to blows with the enemy. We marched and counter-marched—here, there, and everywhere, but upon me it had only the effect of so many tourists on promenade.

"Not one of our officers understood anything about what they had to do.[1] Our colonel was paralysed in his legs and followed the company by little stages in a cab. One night we had news that forty Uhlans were coming to Baccarat to make a requisition. We were then at St. Die, nearly three thousand men of us. But our colonel, our general staff, and the very adjutant himself had forgotten to take the address of the lodgings of the buglers. So, thanks to this negligence, it took from one in the morning till five to get together a company of sixty-five men! At last we started, two hundred and fifteen men, in requisitioned vehicles, to catch the forty fast-riding raiders upon

[1] All this seems so impossible that I am obliged to refer to the report of Mademoiselle Marie Antoinette Lix, pp. 191–203 of *Le Livre d'Or des Femmes de France* (Paris, F. Polo, 1872), which contains the exact experiences of Lieutenant Marie Lix during the war.

Baccarat. I, a mere girl, was quivering with impatience and anger before we started. At last we got under weigh. There were in the dog-cart of a neighbouring proprietor, three captains of the Free Companies of the Jura, two soldiers of 'Ours,' and myself. The Laroche and Jura men followed in other vehicles. It was like an Easter Monday trip of employés.

"To crown all, three officers began, while we were yet on the road, to speak of stopping for lunch at Raon-l'Étape. I looked at them at first, and indeed laughed a little, thinking it was a bad joke. Then, seeing them serious and inclined to discuss the possible *menu*, I said, 'Gentlemen, if you take lunch the Uhlans will certainly be informed of your coming, and will mock bravely at us!'

"They answered that it could not be expected that soldiers would march or fight if they had nothing for lunch. I was inclined to say that so far as I had seen we had done but little of either. We arrived at Raon at seven, and as nothing more had been said I began to hope that my advice had been taken. But, in spite of all, lunch was ordered. At ten we were still at table, when news came from Baccarat that we need not hurry ourselves. The forty Uhlans had arrived there to the minute, had levied their contributions at their ease, were now quietly on their way back, and would soon be within their own lines. I declare that I cried for anger and shame. After this escapade my superior officers dared not go back to St. Die that night, but took up a position in a wood not far from our breakfasting-place! The two soldiers who had been with

us in the dog-cart told their comrades how I had insisted that there should be no halt at Raon, but that we should go straight on to entrap the Uhlans at Baccarat. The soldiers were furious, and would have named me captain by acclamation. But I warned them that if there were the least manifestation on my account in the company, I would instantly resign. This made them hold their tongues. But some were so discouraged that they would not carry their knapsacks. So I took one from the shoulders of a six-foot giant, and carried it on my own till the end of the day. I refused to sup with the well-provisioned officers, but ate black bread with the soldiers. Nevertheless, several refused to mount guard, whereupon I said that if they were frightened, I would stand guard for them. The next day we returned to St. Die, where my friends received me as one for ever lost. But I explained to them that all who wished to live long and obtain free picnics at the expense of the Government ought to join our corps under its new name of 'The Long Life Assurance Company of Laroche,' which I had given it.

"Our commander on this occasion was Captain Duval. He had somewhat the air of a sergeant-major with a pension, and his breast was one panoply of medals, half of them (whispered his orderly) gained at different exhibitions as a manufacturer of walking-sticks, while the other half recorded his triumphs in long-distance swimming. He travelled light, all his furniture and provisions following him in two enormous vans, while he himself caried only a noble gourd filled with old 'kirsch,' which naturally became emptier as the miles grew in number.

"To such a man the fate of six hundred men was committed. He would start bravely at the head of his column, shout windy commands as long as it was day, and going through towns he would look martial enough. But while the rest of us carried our entire campaigning outfit on our backs—sack, thirty-five pounds; *chassepot*, eleven; together with sabre and revolver—the Captain Duval carried only one of his own walking-canes, *and* the famous gourd, the weight of which reduced as we advance. But when, after dark, his officers, I among the number, asked the commandant whither we were going, he looked indignantly at us, took a pull at the gourd, and replied —which was true enough—that that was his business and not ours! But I, at least, was not afraid of any long-distance cane-maker in the world. So I asked him before all the others, 'Captain, will we be long in arriving before the enemy?'

"'Faith, I know no more about it than you do,' the brave Captain answered in a voice which proved that the gourd was by no means so full as it had been.

"'Have you, then, taken guides from among the peasants?' I continued. 'For without them we are sure to get lost among this maze of cross-roads.'

"'Guides, lieutenant,' said he—'what guides? I never take any!'

"'Then, Captain, you must know the country like the palm of your hand?'

"'I have never set foot in it before. Look here, once for all, Lieutenant, a good general has no need

of guides. He marches straight forward till he finds the Prussians. *Then* he thrashes them! *Voilà!*'

"Thus did Captain Duval disclose his plan of battle," concluded the girl lieutenant, "so simple and surprising that I dropped at once to the rear. It is no use arguing with a gallon of old 'kirsch.'"

CHAPTER IV

COUNCIL OF REVISION

MEANWHILE in far Provence, near a sunburnt hill called the Mountain of St. Gabriel, in a part of France quite untouched by the hand of war, where never the boldest Uhlan had pushed a reconnaissance, the officers of the new Government were drawing the last "lot," raising their final levy, as in the days when the first Napoleon took the children from the hoop and spinning-top to replace that Grande Armée, crumbled into ruin from Moscow to the Niemen.

But the last call of Republican Mobiles made by Gambetta and Freycinet had much of that humour in it which lies on the frontier of tears. For days before smart officers of the staff and yet smarter sergeants had pervaded the white streets of St. Gabriel, clinked spurs along the Grande Cours where the *nou-noos* walk with their babies, and the eternally unemployed of the south manage to do nothing all day—and keep a household on the proceeds.

Now, of course, nothing was talked about in St. Gabriel but the war, the infamy of Prussia, and what surprises would be reserved for Von Moltke and Bismarck if they dared to cross the Durance and

appear at the gates of St. Gabriel. Already all that was really most gallant and patriotic in the little town with its red-baked roofs and dusty streets had long ago marched away among the first volunteers, or were in their places in the regiments of the line—or mayhap, in their quiet, unknown graves. The rest had stopped on where they were—and talked. Ah, how they had talked—and threatened . . . . in the Café du Camargue and that of "Le Brave Henri." Especially in the latter had the white plumes shone. Companies had been formed, officers chosen, watches set. But somehow the first wet night brought them all in, officers and men alike, to the long bright room of "Le Brave Henri," where the landlord smiled and rubbed his hands as they stacked their rifles in the corner. Here, at least, was a moment of repose from the storms of war, while the wet and unhurt "Leaguers of the Midi" sat with a mounting pillar of little saucers before each of them, and destroyed alternatively the Crown Prince and Manteuffel, or Von Moltke and the Red Frederic, till not an invader was left on the sacred soil of the fatherland. On late nights, when hope and *picquette* ran high, it was solemnly disputed whether "the Republic" should be content with the Rhine, from Swiss-glacier to Hollander-dyke for a boundary, or whether they should demand also the Rhine provinces, and at last finish with the Minster of Cologne, with a tricolour tied to its weathercock.

Strangely enough, the news of the morning might be ever so discouraging, the day lamentably long drawn out and filled only with yawns and strategic marches to the nearest hamlet, but the evening in

Council of Revision

"Le Brave Henri" chased all fears away, and Moltke and Manteuffel were once more trodden under foot.

But this last conscription, which certain good gentlemen in Tours and Bordeaux called the levy *en masse*, was on the face of it something infinitely more serious. For one thing, the business of the draft was administrative, and every Frenchman, however much he may hate the Government of his country, has an instinctive respect for the administration thereof.

At the mouldy, dust-powdered door of the Mairie, peasants too old for the conscription stood about with their eyes on their Auguste or Jean Marie—who, like their Napoleonic predecessors, would gladly have betaken themselves to the sweetshops and stalls aligned along the market-place. But within the Mairie the scene was solemn enough. The authorities were in session. The new Prefect, sent like a parcel from Paris by the Government on the 4th September, was a journalist who had once had the good fortune to be imprisoned under the Empire. Thus under the Republic his fortune was as good as made. At first he had been ill received among the aristocracy of the south, royalist to the core. But since universal conscription had been ordered, many fathers of families and not a few mothers had called upon him. With him were the Mayor of St. Gabriel, and a general on the retired list, but now temporarily commanding the subdivision. Two local doctors sat on chairs a little apart, each with a scared look, knowing well that their best-paying patients would consider them mere murderers if their sons were sent to the War in the East, as it was called in Provence.

Now the Prefect was as ready with the spoken word as with the pen. Indeed, he had always some catchword with which he bored his audiences. People who had suffered most often declared that these were the titles of his ancient leading articles, and that what followed was only the article itself warmed up a little. But the young spur-clanking officers retired discreetly into the corridor at the first sign of a prefectorial speech. The Mayor went to sleep in his comfortable chair. The General looked over sheaves of papers that rustled. Only the faithful gendarmes stood with eyes fixed at attention, ready to suffer for their country. And accordingly it was to them that the Prefect addressed himself. His present phrase was "the Idea of the Government" in instituting military service, universal and compulsory, for vague bands of *franc-tireurs*.

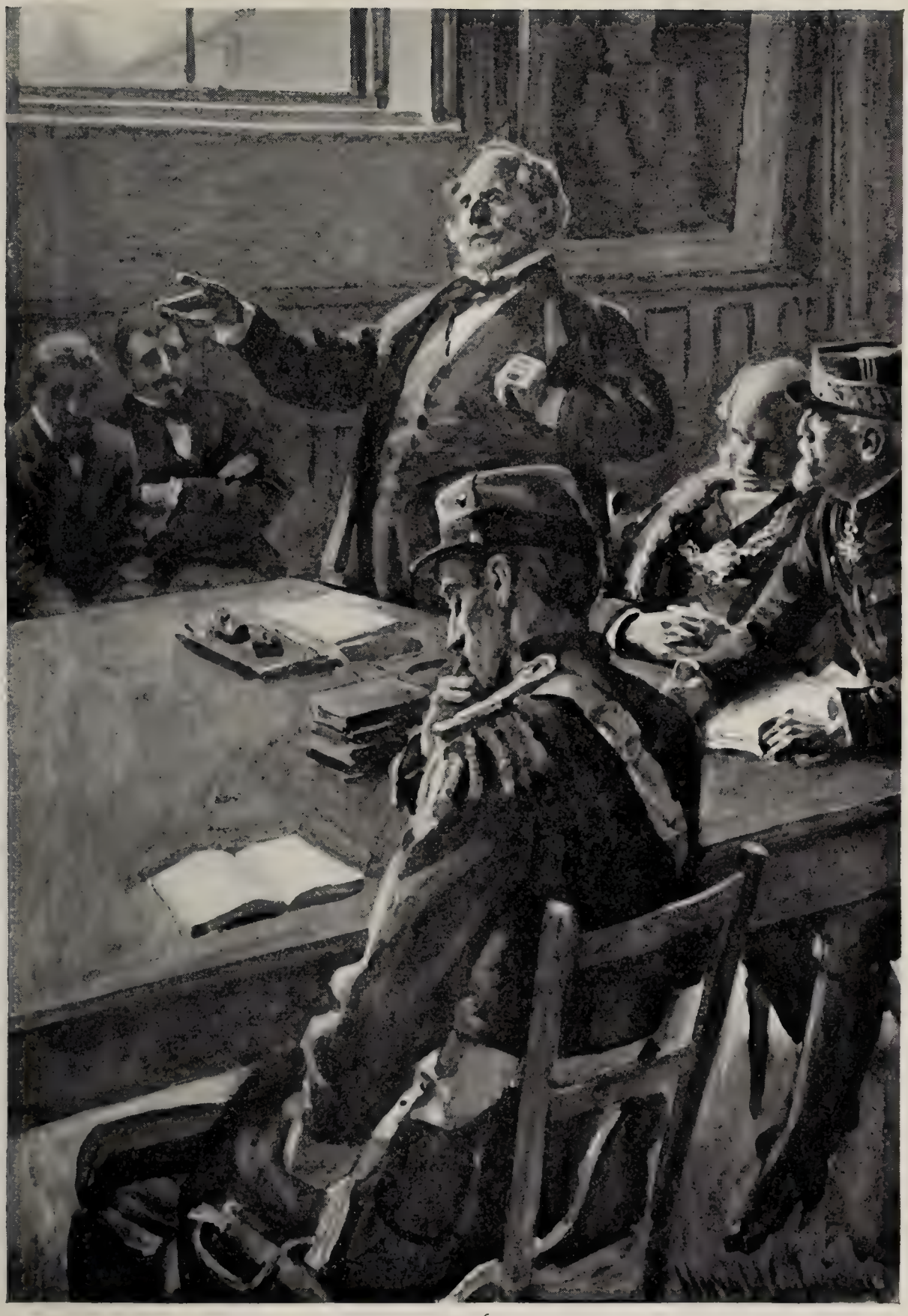
"The millionaire's son," he affirmed, "shall march side by side with the son of the mountain shepherd, the heir of the great manufacturer sleep in the next cot to one of his own workmen. This is the Idea of the Government!"

"It is five minutes to twelve," said the General abruptly, ceasing for a moment the rustling of his papers in order to pull out his watch.

"It is my duty to explain," said the Prefect—"I may say it is at once my duty and my privilege. The Government expects it of me."

Fuming, the General thrust out his legs and glanced enviously at the slumbering Mayor, who could be so much at ease in the Municipal Palace of St. Gabriel.

"There are a lot of eggs in this basket," he grumbled.



'THIS IS THE IDEA OF THE GOVERNMENT!'

"Why not get the conscripts together, and then let a man get out of this harness!"

The Prefect took no notice, but opened his flood-gates yet wider. The gendarmes nerved themselves to a longer spell of expressionless immobility, and in the antechamber some fifty young men, lightly clad for the ordeal, shivered and played off mirthless jokes which not even the jester pretended to enjoy.

"The Idea of the Government is a noble one," the Prefect went on; "the scion of a noble race, the untaught labourer, the charcoal-burner from far forests, the miner with the dust of the pit upon him——"

"In my command he shall have a bath," growled the General, "if I have to soap him myself."

"It is the Idea of the Government," the unwearied Prefect went on; "no one shall be exempt. This is the new and perfect Republic. All shall be equal. The time shall be——"

"Twelve o'clock! Call in Number One," interrupted the General, who could stand this no more. The Mayor awaked, looked about him to make sure he was not in bed, perceived his robes, and in his turn began to address the audience.

"Gentlemen of the municipality," he said pompously.

But with him the General-commanding stood on no ceremony, because in his private capacity the Mayor was Government contractor for boots to the sub-division.

"Hold your tongue!" he said brusquely, "one speaking at a time is enough. This is military business, after all."

Number One advanced with a modest assurance,

confident in his powerful protectors. The Mayor, who had never assisted at a Council of Revision before, checked himself in the act of ordering Number One into custody for daring to appear in the Mairie in a dress so primitive. But the General cut him short.

"Your name, age, and rank?" said the General to Number One.

"In the true Republic," exclaimed the Prefect, "there are no ranks."

"There are in the army!" shouted the General, glowering fiercely at the civil authority.

The Prefect, refusing to be put down, repeated several times that it was the Idea of the Government.

"Joseph-John-Marie de Boulbon," answered the young man, after they had settled their quarrel.

The Prefect leaned towards the ear of the General and whispered, "His father is a friend of mine—called upon me last week—his support important, most important to the Government."

The General nodded with the air of one who knew all about it.

"I am interested in Number Six," he said, consulting the list before him.

"Exempt!" said the Prefect, and with no more delay than putting on his clothes, Number One was restored to the bosom of an anxious family waiting outside. Then, during the consideration of the next four cases, nothing material happened. They were common lads enough, some of them sons of widows, others with weak chests, ready to be nipped in the first frost of the campaign—but in any case good enough to fill the ranks of the Mobiles. They had no

friends at court. Their stammered explanations were not attended to. The entire Council of Revision seemed to be suddenly stricken deaf when one of them spoke.

But the General's friend, Number Six, found deficient in eyesight, was immediately exempted. So was Number Seven, the nephew of the Mayor, though the champion athlete of the town. Then Number Eight told how his father and brother had been killed, one at Worth and one at Saint Privat. Much against his will he must stay with his mother and take care of the ewes during the lambing season. After that he would gladly volunteer.

"Good for the service!" pronounced the Prefect of the Republic of fraternity and equality, adding for the fiftieth time that this was the Idea of the Government.

Thus, and not otherwise, did the impartial Council of Revision of the town of St. Gabriel perform its delicate functions and manfully carry through its task.[1]

Among those who asked for no exemption and declared no infirmity was a young man upon whose erect carriage even the General cast a look of favour, while the officer of recruitment jotted him down in his book as possessing "the makings of a smart colour-sergeant." His name was Ludovic Villars, and he was the son of a banker and money-lender who, so they said, had long ago fled the country to escape a disgraceful failure. Ludovic had been brought up by his maternal aunt, a very respectable woman who took in washing. But he had educated himself in the schools of St. Gabriel, at the college at Montpellier,

[1] *Vide* L. Pichon, *Le* 101 *Moblots*, Paris, 1874.

hoping one day to make himself a member of the bar and advocate of the courts. But out of session and in his own country he worked at the trade which he had learned in order to use as one uses a tool. He became a plumber—a trade which, in St. Gabriel, is chiefly conducted on the crumbling roofs of tiled houses with every hair and tag of clothing blown out stiffly southward by the mighty winds of the Rhone Valley.

But at Montpellier he was Ludovic Villars, student and bursar of the faculty of law in the university of that learned city.

CHAPTER V.

JONATHAN AND HIS DAVID

IN a day or two after the adventure of David Alix and the Military Chaplain, it happened that the forces of Von Hartmann, checked in their southward movement, turned northward, with the purpose of sweeping the two mountain departments of the Doubs and the Jura clear of "bush-whackers," as also of the lingering débris of Bourbaki's broken army of the south-east, now safely refuged in Switzerland. The Germans opened out a very wide front, Uhlans and lancers scouring the plains and valleys, while with patient assiduity the slower-footed infantry searched every clump and drew each copse and forest.

Soldiers in uniform, assumed to have formed part of Bourbaki's command, were directed upon Germany. But even so, the numbers of the regiments were carefully compared with the known rolls of the French armies which had surrendered to the Swiss colonels. If a man were wounded he was required to undergo an examination as to when and where he had received his hurt. If the wound appeared too fresh, or the unfortunate was unable to show his *livret militaire*, his chances of being treated to the sharp shrift

accorded to the unlicensed *franc-tireur* were greatly increased.

But for all that, the deaths among German sentries, "gallopers," and baggage escorts rather increased than diminished, as the battalions turned their faces in the direction of Belfort, still gallantly holding out.

Along the edges of that gloomy lake of St. Point, from which pours the infant Doubs, dead men were lying, each with his own piece of rock behind him chipped and battered by the hail of bullets, of which he had received the necessary quota in heart and brain. These, however, were the solitary fighters, each for his own hand, and they had died singly, promptly, with their faces to the foe whom, ever since they had buckled on the cartridge-belt, they had waited and manœuvred to slay.

Marching through the gorge of La Cluse and along the Swiss frontier, the battalions of Von Hartmann swept both sides of the Doubs water as far as Morteau. They encamped finally at the bend of the river, where it first becomes the boundary between France and the Confederation. As clear as ever the German bugles sounded, throwing out, as it were mechanically, this way and that, the units of the wondrous war machine. The white shelter tents went up on the barer spots. Beneath, the Lake of Brenets had kept open its deep green waters shadowed by the pines thickly ranged along the sides of the steep gorge of the Doubs.

Three miles away they could hear the dull sough of the Falls of the Doubs, while just beneath rose the steep roofs of the village where the General and his staff were already installed.

And David, to whom all this country had been familiar since infancy, pointed south across the pine-filled valley of the Doubs to where, on the Swiss slopes, a house smoked hospitably and kindly. It was a large building with many outhouses, half stock-farm, half château.

"My mother's house—the farm of Villars Chaumont," he explained.

"In our country we should call it a château if it were only half that size," said the Military Chaplain, into whose care David Alix had been committed. "Now at last it is clear to me why you were always so spoiled in the matter of lodgings when we were at the College-on-the-Mound. You were rich and never told us."

"You are wrong," David answered gently, with the curious compelling quiet in his voice which made belief by no means a matter of choice. "All *that* belongs to my mother as the heir of my step-father. But I shall never touch a copper nor call a stone of it my own."

"These be most noble sentiments, my David," said the Chaplain, "and do you credit. But as in my old age, when a grateful country retires me with a pension of two silver marks a day, I mean to come and spend the evening of my life 'sitting under you,' as they used to say in Scotland, do not, I beg of you, let any such quixotry stand between me and my little comforts!"

"It is no quixotry," David Alix went on; "though I am the only son of my mother, I am not her only child—for which I thank God, as you will also, my friend, when you see my half-sister Noélie!"

"I am a rough fellow and hardened by this campaigning work. I fear it will say little to me though your sister be fair as the Star of the Shepherds which they see calling them home!"

Then David Alix told how his beautiful mother, left poor by the death of his father within a year after his own birth, had designed the boy from his cradle for that "ministry of the Word" which his father's life had, on these green Jura mountains, so well illustrated. To enable David Alix the Younger to do this under the most favourable auspices, Madame David the Elder had consented to marry a wealthy French banker, who for his own reasons was living retired on the borders of Switzerland, and, if reports were to be trusted, still making a considerable profit, at the time of his marriage, by finding money for the great watch manufacturers of Le Lochle and Fonds—both to increase their business, and also by enabling them to reach the French markets without having to submit their goods to the formality and expense of a Customs' examination. His headquarters were south of Berets and directly opposite the French village of Chaillaxon, which Monsieur Villars had gradually made into a city of refuge for the most daring smugglers on all the frontiers of the East—men who, as the saying went, had "no cold in their eyes." But now, apparently, the Government of France was reaping the benefit of what it had so long attempted to suppress. For in all the districts occupied by the Germans there was not one in which they had to fight harder to maintain themselves than in that smuggling, fighting, turbulent, debatable land of the Upper Doubs.

'MY MOTHER'S HOUSE—THE FARM OF VILLARS CHAUMONT,' HE EXPLAINED.

"And that," said David, "was largely the doing of my step-father, Monsieur Henri Antoine Villars, once a banker of Provence. Against himself I have nothing to say, that is, so far as I am personally concerned. He was a good husband to my mother, a good father to me. But his ways were not ours—at least, not mine. And since his death I have thought it my duty to repay into the estate that will one day be Noélie's, every *centime* of what he expended on making me a pastor!"

The Military Chaplain laughed aloud, and clapped his friend on the back.

"Hear him," he cried. "Surely, my David, you have neglected the reading of your Bible! Did you ever chance to read what the people of Israel did when they spoiled the Egyptians? I suppose, of course, that your step-father was a Catholic?"

"No," David answered, regretfully and thoughtfully, "I do not think that a single thought of religion ever entered his head. But then, again, he did not in the least interfere with that of any one else. And that is why I was able without hindrance to become a missioner of the Evangel at Edinburgh and Geneva, and also why my mother, though ten years married to this Provençal banker, continued to be known by the people among whom my father did his lifework as 'Madame David Alix'!"

At this point David's tale seemed to hesitate a little. He looked down with, as it seemed, a certain shame, which caused the Military Chaplain to call out heartily, "What, my David, since you know so much about this smuggling business, own up, lad! Did you not take a

trip or two yourself across the frontier, when the blood was young and ran hotly in the veins?"

Instead of being helped to that confession which eases the soul, David appeared more embarrassed than ever.

"It is not as you think," he said in a low voice, and with his eyes upon the goats' path by which they were descending into the valley; "but—but—I have had doubts—doubts which I have never shared with any but you, Hermann, that since my father's death, my mother has continued and even increased his wholesale smuggling traffic!"

"And suppose she has, what then?" said the Military Chaplain, with a friendly arm on David's shoulder. "Why, all women are born smugglers—the best of them will lie like ragpickers when passing through a Customs House. I have a mother at home. Better and more saintly has no man, and yet if Mother Falk came back from seeing her sister at Dorpat (which, you may remember, is in Russia) without both side-pockets bulging with caviare for herself and blond tobacco for the Father, she would feel that she had lost her opportunities—yes, and tempted Providence by disdaining the good things it had put in her way! Therefore be easy in your mind, my David. Let your mother smuggle a little or a great deal, according to the way of life in which her lot has been cast!"

David was not at all convinced by this reasoning. He felt, however, that it was no time to argue upon such questions. The Chaplain had arranged with his brother of the Stettiners to take his duty, so that he

was free for the night. It would be good, he thought, to dine once more with napkin and a white tablecloth before him, in a country not war-ruined, to see the gleam of silver on the board, and happy faces about it. He had the permission of the Colonel in his pocket, and in any case, was he not Hermann Falk, Chaplain of Trossel's Colberg Grenadiers, and in some wise confessor-extraordinary to the King-Emperor? In any case, not a man to be lightly said "No" to! He was accustomed rather to make his own way through things, this stalwart, vehement, martial, headstrong Chaplain of the Colberg Regiment!

But the Pastor was pursued by a certain diffidence.

"Hermann," he said, "you will excuse my mother if you find her sympathies are strongly French in this sad business. The daughter of a French-speaking farmer in Alsace, the wife of a Provençal banker, with a daughter educated in Montauban and Paris, she is not like us other Switzers—French, Germans, and Italians dwelling under one roof, governed by one Confederation, without one being better considered than the others!"

"Ah!" said the Chaplain, "you Swiss! You are the marvels of Europe, spoiling the Egyptian at your leisure and according to your consciences—the only quarrel among your cantons being that no one shall monopolise the plunder—Switzerland, to which come the powers of the earth and the glory of them, jingling their purses and saying, 'Here we are, strangers, pray take us in!'"

But David held to his thought in his slow mild way. "You will be welcome in that part of the Château

of Villars Chaumont which is mine. All I have is yours. You shall eat at my table and lie in my bed. For the rest, it will be better to shut your eyes and your ears to what neither you nor I can help!"

"Steady, my David," quoth the Chaplain of the Colbergers; "I am neither a fool nor a youngling; I find myself perforce in your mother's country, and these my people in the tents over yonder are making war on her friends and relatives—why, then, should I expect to be welcome? Why, if you were chaplain of the Jura mountain artillery, parked in front of *my* mother's house and cutting up her lawn with your horses' feet—well, it would be lucky for you that you understood no German. For if you did, your ears would assuredly tingle!"

The Pastor might still further have apologised, but Chaplain Hermann Falk abruptly bade him push on up the hill, for the sight of a good meal, well spread, would atone for much worse than a tongue-thrashing.

"And if she will give me that, the lady your mother, she may stand over me and say what pleases her all the time. But in the present state of my appetite, the first necessity with me is not welcome, but *dinner!* David, lead on!"

And, with the air of a general of division, he pointed up the path to the farm-château on the high terrace, chanting as he did so in English speech, but with a strong Germanic accent, "Courage, brother, do not stumble!"

CHAPTER VI.

A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH

THEY came into a new land as they climbed up and up. Away across the valley of the Doubs, on the French side, the farm of Les Collines still smoked, the last faint blue reek rising high into the still air. There, said David, a tragedy had been grimly acted out. Father François, his rifle broken into two pieces, lay dead on the threshold. At the corner of the granary his son Louis also had been left, the old blunderbuss he used for scaring rooks twisted underneath him; Mother François — called La Grande Flore—sobbed somewhere, doubtless, on the edges of the woods. David, with arm extended, pointed it out to his friend, who stood with lowering brow, sighing deeply, the heart within him infinitely sad.

"It is war!" he muttered. "God help us, God give us peace! Yet I see not how to prevent it. We ourselves—for I take you to be at heart of your adopted country—taught you the way. Often have I heard my Gran'ther Fritz tell of how it was after Jena and Eylau—still more after the Beresina, and again after Leipzig—the men of every German bourg

fell upon the rear of the French retreat. Then woe to the pillaging hussar who slipped a little aside from the main column in the hope that by good riding he might regain his comrades with a brace of fowls or a ham a-swing at his saddle-bow. Perhaps the hope of *schnapps* tempted him, perhaps only the lust of adventure, seeing far off the chimney of a farm possibly yet unplundered! Woe to the 'galloper' with a horse fallen suddenly lame. That day the 'Little Corporal' waited in vain for despatches. A man fell out to bandage his feet, an infantryman eased himself of the sack which had been making his back feel like one single wound! A rustling behind the hedge, the muzzle of a blunderbuss poked through almost against the back of the solitary man, a puff of blue smoke, some noise, but not much—for the peasants, poachers to a man, knew the secret of the quarter charge at short ranges—and then again at roll-call that night a man was lacking when 'Dubois' or 'Rossel' was called by the sergeant of his company! Then next day, as it has been done over yonder, peasant-folk were slain, women were widows or worse, and farm-house after farmhouse went up in flames like that poor Les Collines of Père François!"

"Yes, I have heard it all," David answered; "there are excuses enough—precedents to spare. I know that the peasants will, whatever I say, continue to make war in their own fashion, and when taken, be content to die for it. There have been guerillas, 'free corps,' solitary fighters in all wars. Why, my mother remembers how in 1814, at the Gorges of Toul, the peasants made a scheme, under the leadership of one

Commander Brice, to carry off the Emperors Alexander and Francis. It took thirty thousand men to take the sovereigns through the pass! Yes, thirty thousand, and with them the best artillery of the guard. Whereupon General Wrede, commanding the allied armies, solemnly summoned a court-martial and tried Commander Brice. He was condemned to death, in absence, and executed in effigy! But, says my mother in conclusion, 'that did not prevent him eating an excellent dinner in this very house thirty-five years after!'"

Through the slight haze which the burning of Les Collines had spread along the Swiss plateau of the Doubs, they came to Villars Chaumont. David Alix, avoiding the great court, made as if to enter by a little door overlooking the hills of Canton Neuchâtel. For this doubtless he had his reasons. There was a noise in the courtyard which made itself heard even above the rough voices of angry men in the heat of debate. It was the cry of a woman mourning the death of all that were dear to her—the cry which, in our colder regions of the north, is only heard when a child is born into the world. It was La Grande Flore wailing for her husband and son done to death, for the home plundered and burned, for her daughter and herself suddenly thrust out homeless and well-nigh mad.

As the Chaplain of Trossel's Colbergers put his hand upon the little iron railing which protected the few worn steps that led up to David's private rooms in Villars Chaumont, a shot was fired from the window in the angle to the right. The Military Chaplain did

not fall instantly. His right hand clutched more tightly the rail of the outside stairway. He felt his feet grow numb and heavy beneath him. The fingers of the other hand went groping uncertainly towards the breast of his tunic, and as David Alix, suddenly realising into what a death-trap he had unwittingly led the preserver of his life, turned suddenly on the threshold with the key still in his hand, the Military Chaplain fell forward into his arms.

David carried his wounded friend to his own bed—no easy task for a man so much slighter than Hermann Falk. Hastily he locked the door, and without inquiry or pause stripped off the Chaplain's coat, cutting away the linen to lay bare the wound. It was under the shoulder to the right. The bullet, fired from above, had glided off the shoulder-blade, and embedded itself in the flesh near the backbone. Now David had learned something of surgery in a rough way in the couple of summer sessions spent at Edinburgh, when he frequented the hospitals. He saw at once that there would be no more campaigning for Hermann Falk for many a day.

The first words of the Chaplain as he came to himself were characteristic.

"David," he said, "I am glad you did not stick that knife of yours through my uniform coat. It is the only one I shall have till I see old Manteuffel's captain of equipment!"

"Oh, Hermann," David cried, his eyes brimming and his fingers knotting and untwining themselves with grief, "how can you ever forgive me for having brought you straight to this abode of bloody men?

I thought that here at least you would be safe! In my mother's house, in my company—you, the man who only a little while ago saved my life!"

"The fortune of war, my David," said the Military Chaplain; "but hand me my coat again. So—hold it for me." He groped long in the pockets with his untouched arm. "Ah, my pipe is safe, and you, good friend, Old Armed Neutrality, let me see if you are all ready to say your few words!"

And smiling like a child with a toy, the Chaplain clicked a spring and turned the revolving chamber of a regulation army officer's revolver, counting the cartridges as he did so. "One, two, three, four, five, and six! Good! What arms have you, my David, in case we should be again attacked?"

There was a pause while the wounded man inventoried the contents of David's pockets and bedroom. "A pen-holder, a piece of sealing-wax, a clothes-brush—not much help there, David! An ink-eraser—good! A nail-file—better and better. There now, my David, that you have made me comfortable, don't you think that you might go off and see what it is all about, only—lock the door and take the key with you. I and old 'Armed Neutrality' here will stop and keep watch!"

David Alix was going out when Hermann Falk called him back.

"I suppose now I shall be a prisoner of war if these Swiss fellows of yours see me. I am across the boundary-line. But at any rate, get me a doctor who will take this piece of lead out—not one of those rascally French fellows who refused to attend on

their own men when Bourbaki came this way. A little too far with a French probe and it would be all over with Hermann Falk! Oh, for old Schmidt of the Colbergers, though I quarrel with him every day and all the day! But I suppose a Swiss-trained butcher will have to serve. Trossel's Colbergers cannot do without chaplain and doctor both at once, with *franc-tireurs* taking freedoms from every window even in peaceful Switzerland. But oh, David, see that the Colonel hears of this. What a disgrace if the Emperor's own chaplain were marked a deserter on the regimental rolls!"

CHAPTER VII.

SISTER NOÉLIE

BUT instead of Pastor David Alix there came into the chamber of the wounded German chaplain a wonderful vision. In spite of locked doors it came, appearing in the shape of the young girl, one Noélie, half-sister to David Alix. She wore her black hair knotted low on her neck. Her eyes were dark also, and full of the softening mist of tears unshed. As she opened the door which David had locked so carefully, she tinkled a bunch of keys that hung at her waist. She found the Military Chaplain of the Colbergers with his eye glinting along the tube of his revolver. For he knew not at all what, in that house from which he had been already fired upon, he might expect to enter when the door opened.

But Noélie Villars entered fearlessly. With the master-key of the housewife in her hand, she smiled down upon Hermann Falk.

"I come as a friend," she said, in very good German, "I am terribly sorry for what has happened. It was that poor mad woman whose husband and son were shot dead in front of their own burning dwelling—La Grande Flore of Les Collines. Before La Petite could

stop her, she had seized her daughter's *chassepot*—she is in the Laroche corps, a lieutenant—and fired at you as you were coming up the path!"

The Military Chaplain nodded his head and let drop the muzzle of his pistol. He heard what the girl said in a sort of vague way, as if it were nothing personal to himself. It was as if he heard rather by some sixth sense than by his ears. The fever of his wound kept mounting within him. He saw through a milky blue haze which buzzed, but yet without himself losing consciousness in the least. Indeed, his perceptions seemed, if anything, clearer than before. Only he could not answer. His tongue refused its office. He was living in a kind of dream, contented, and ready to accept anything that was brought him by this young girl, the like of whom for daintiness and a curious practical precision of speech and action he had never seen.

"Let me see the wound!" The words seemed to arrive from afar. "You can safely trust to me. Not long ago I was Sister Noélie of the Schwesternhaus of the Red Cross above Neuchâtel, to which the cars run on cogged wheels up the steep hill. So all this—your wound and all, is child's play to one who has nursed Bourbaki's men. There—turn a little on the pillow. I will call my brother David!"

It somehow appeared to the wounded man that if she went now, he would be left to the mercy of the mad woman. His speech returned. He called to her in German to stay with him, and ex-Sister Noélie, of the Schwesternhaus on the hill above the lake to which the cogged cars ran, turned on the threshold

HIS EYE GLINTING ALONG THE TUBE OF HIS REVOLVER.

of the door and signed imperiously to Hermann Falk to be silent. But she accompanied the gesture with a smile of encouragement which caused the Military Chaplain to sink down with a sigh on his pillow. He understood that he was no longer a free agent, and if Sister Noélie, late of the Red Cross, had returned rifle in hand, he might have smiled, but he could not have moved hand or foot!

After that he did not remember much more, at least not clearly. Only she had not gone away. Someone else was there too. Who could it be? Oh, yes, David! But again, who was David? What a fool he was! Of course, the David of the old hacked benches in the Church history classroom, where they began to attend when the Principal threw himself clear of his gown that he might the more clearly grapple with the deep things of God (which are also the commonplaces of the life of man). There was that difficulty about the desires which a man cannot help—were they sinful or not? He must have that out with the professor. But before he could engage in theological argument, the soft touch of fingers distracted him. Who would have thought that the Professor of Church History had a hand like cool velvet. And then, before Hermann Falk could make up his mind on this point (which somehow seemed all of a sudden more important than all philosophy), the whole world blurred and ran together with a sweet, sticky suffocation—which proceeded from a handkerchief imbued with chloroform that David Alix, under the direction of the doctor, held to his friend's face.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT PEACE, BUT A SWORD

PASTOR DAVID ALIX found his mother's neighbour, the farmer's wife of Les Collines, raging fiercely that she had not been allowed to enter and finish "the German murderer." For the moment he understood that there was nothing to be done with her. She would not even listen to his words, striking with her nails at his face like a cat loth to see her children drowned. He told her that it was not by any means the Pomeranian Regiment, of which his friend was chaplain, which had fired the farm and shot down her two bread-winners; that was the act of Van der Tann's Bavarians. She would not listen, raving against all Germans and crying that she would die happy if only she could blood them one by one. Her daughter, the officer of *franc-tireurs*, whose fame and exploits had first called the attention of the invaders to the farm, sat holding her mother in her chair with the strong, weather-nipped hands that had so easily managed the *chassepot* in many a stiff skirmish.

She was whispering in her mother's ear. David could not make out her words, but seeing that they

calmed the furious woman far more than his untimely ministrations, he left the two together. Lieutenant Flore François, of the Laroche Free Corps, was not by any means enforcing spiritual consolations to the mother who had seen the blood of her beloved. On the contrary, speaking for the Laroche Corps and for herself, she promised vengeance, sure, prompt, and complete. Not one who had had anything to do with the slaughter of Father François and the young Louis should escape. It was certainly no time for David to persist. The gospel of forgiveness to enemies stood no chance within sight of the smoking, blood-drenched threshold of Les Collines, on the hill over against the window of Villars Chaumont where widowed mother and fatherless daughter sat together. Their spirit was that which sent down Samson to slay the Philistines.

David went to his mother's chamber to ask for her assistance. It was empty. A deep cupboard in the wall stood open. He looked within. It extended far under the stoop of the roof, and contained rifles and packages of ammunition, closely and carefully ranged. It was the first time that David had acquired any certainty as to the purpose his mother had in making Château Villars Chaumont a rendezvous of so many men—men lying on straw in barns and sheds, men sleeping among the hay in the byres, men to be lodged all night and fed all day, coming in at meal-times from outlying chalets and fodder-sheds.

For long, indeed, he had feared that his mother, caught by his step-father's example, had continued the course of successful smuggling by which he had

re-made his fortune. But this was something infinitely worse. Chaumont was neither a depôt for feeding the unfortunate, as he had once ignorantly imagined, nor yet a smuggling centre, as he had feared, but an illegal place of arms on neutral soil! Certainly David Alix was a Frenchman by adoption, but his Genevan birth and Presbyterian upbringing caused him to shrink from what, if known in Germany, might bring the victorious armies of the new-made Kaiser upon the free Swiss cantons, and especially upon those of the south and west, where the French speech of the people presupposed French sympathies. David Alix stood a moment silent before the array of arms. He was not a man of strong sudden resolve like his friend, the Chaplain of Trossel's Colbergers. In such matters he felt the need of advice. His life had been that of a student, early designed to the work for which, when the day came, he felt himself best fitted. This fratricidal war had from the first filled him with deep sorrow. Why all this killing? For the sake of vindicating the honour of one country or another! What was honour? Could it only be supported by slaughter, pain, death? He could not but think that there were other ways. Perhaps if the sacred soil of the Confederation had been invaded, David Alix, the Genevan, might have thought differently. But the Swiss pastor, naturally a man of peace, had not taken on the desperation of French patriotism along with his citizen's ticket.

It was very different with his mother. No fiercer partisan ever set out across the boundary of the Franche Comté to harass an invader than the

preacher's widow. Over an area of many square miles Madame David the Elder was known. Her son, the Pastor, was indeed the distributor of gifts of food for the healthy, of wine and medical comforts for the ailing or the wounded. He carried them to Protestant and Catholic alike. But when he entered with the upraised hand of benediction, and the prayer that God's peace should be upon the house, some young fellow in a corner would thrust a hat, with a rakish cock's feather stuck into the band of it, hastily underneath the seat, and keep his feet very squarely to the front, lest the minister should know that he also had been "out"—with a rifle in his hand—and his life not worth five minutes' purchase if the Bavarians got hold of him. Yet that same young fellow would look after the tall form, clad in deep-skirted black, with something like a grin on his face. He appreciated the Pastor—no man more. But he chuckled at the thought that it was Madame of Villars Chaumont herself who had placed that rifle in his hand and adjusted the feather in his hat. For which good gift it was the least that he could do to toss the soft plumed hat upon his head, drop a double handful of cartridges into his pouch, and take the road, crouching behind hedges and following the skirts of woods, to see that the Pastor lacked not suitable convoy in that country of marauders. In his heart of hearts, he considered him not a little "soft"—which opinion he did not state in words, but conveyed it by a little sidelong movement of the hand across his brow with the index-finger extended.

On this occasion, after several failures, David Alix

found his mother in the buttery, directing half-a-dozen men how to fill cartridges for a dozen or two smooth-bore guns standing in the corner.

"Mother, I should like to speak with you a moment," said David Alix.

She turned upon him with black eyes in which was a glitter like olive oil. She was not a very tall woman, but every gesture affirmed command—and the consciousness of power.

She turned with a certain quick fury on her face, but the expression faded at sight of her son standing in the doorway. She went out to him instantly, closing the door, while the men who had been filling the cartridges kept their backs persistently turned to the Pastor.

"Well, David, and what is it?" said his mother, smoothly enough.

"Mother, you break my heart," he answered her. "You know well what has happened; they have shot the man who saved my life a day or two ago when I was arrested in company with Jules le Noir, his gun yet warm from the killing of the Prussian officer, and provisions for a dozen about my waist and in the skirts of my coat! Then I bring the man who saved me, my friend and fellow-student, to my mother's house that she may thank him. Instead, as he mounts the steps of my own chamber—even as I hold the door open for my guest—your guest—to pass in, he is treacherously shot down!"

Madame David the Elder took her son's arm and led him over to the window which looked down upon the little staircase where the Chaplain had received

his wound. First she pointed to the slight stain on the top step where Hermann Falk had fallen, then across the misty Doubs valley to the smouldering ruins of what had been the thriving farm of Les Collines. The shrug of her shoulders clinched the unspoken argument more clearly than words.

"But," cried David, indignantly defending his friend, "Hermann Falk had nothing to do with that —neither he, nor his regiment, nor even his army corps!"

"You speak like the son of your father, the Genevan," retorted his mother, "not like the Frenchman you are by voluntary adoption. For me, I would rather have died than taken my life as a gift from the King of Prussia himself! The man you brought here is a German—a barbarian, a burner of houses, a slayer of men!"

"Mother," said the Pastor gently, "he was my bench-comrade at Edinburgh. Then there was neither Jew nor Greek among us, but only men of one blood striving in holy emulation to learn the things of God!"

The face of the Pastor's widow twitched. She heard a sound as of unforgotten music; she dwelt once more peacefully beside a Man of Peace. Instinctively she looked at her hands. They were grimed with the powder-dust of her laboratory, and in a moment of shame she slid them behind her.

"I am sorry," she said, with more meekness than she had yet shown. "I did all I could to prevent her. But the truth is, that the woman was mad. They had made her mad, and your friend, wearing their uniform, had to bear the consequences!"

"Where is she now?" David Alix asked in his slow, measured way.

"She has gone away with her daughter back to Les Collines!" said his mother. The Pastor had a soft persistence which could always extort an answer from his mother, and indeed from all between Le Lochle and Pontarlier. Every shepherding boy and wandering goose-girl knew him as "Our Pastor David." They loved him for his beautiful countenance, like that of the young shepherd, that David, son of Jesse, who was a dweller in Bethlehem. For the like reason also they loved him; and without him no feast could go forward, nor any anointing blessing be poured out.

Yet their affection was almost maternal and wholly protective. The men were careful to hide their guerilla exploits from him, while they would willingly boast of these to his mother, having discerned in her the warlike spirit which is the characteristic of the French borderer, especially on the side of the south-east.

David the Peacemaker did not give up hope at once. He wrestled with his mother; he pled with her. He quoted Scripture, and even prayed for the opening of her heart, the touching of her conscience. His peace apostolate came from no fear of death. Was he not the man who in the morning redness had faced the levelled needle-guns at Mouthe? A dozen times a day he took his life in his hand, crossing the German posts, and marching through woods thick with lawless men behind every bush, as like as not looking at him along the barrel of a

gun. David Alix was ready to die rather than that the least of his duties should be left undone. But to the Genevan, trained in Presbyterian equality of the sternest sort, it seemed as wicked that the young *franc-tireur* should shoot a sentry from a steady rest, a man against whom personally he had no grudge, as that in revenge the Bavarians should burn Les Collines and shoot its two defenders, the man François and the boy Louis!

However, his mother declared to him that, of a surety, La Grande Flore had returned with her daughter to Les Collines. "And," she added, "if we do not have news of these Bavarians by to-morrow, something will surely have befallen them on the way."

David turned away with a sigh. He had, he knew, effected nothing real with his mother. Still, he was glad that the poor demented Widow François of Les Collines was gone. He took a glass and examined the long road by which he and Hermann Falk had come to the house of Villars Chaumont. It seemed such a long time since that they had laughed in Madame Virginie's in Mouthe, where the Chaplain of Colberg's Grenadiers had his lodgings. Then he returned to the chamber of the wounded man. The door was locked and bolted. But within he heard a soft stir. He tapped, and then after a moment's pause came the whisper, "David?" "Noélie!" he answered. There was no need for more. None had a voice like David Alix, so gentle, so gracious, so persuasive. The door was opened. The Military Chaplain was asleep, his strong face turned towards the window. The sunlight fell on the blonde hair and

golden beard of the Goth, softened and harmonised by the few greying hairs which ran through both, and denoted rather youth well-exercised and manhood in maturity, than any approach of age. A book and some knitting lay on the little table beside the ordinance revolver of the Chaplain. As she worked, Noélie had been reading the Gospel of Saint John—"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

But even as she settled herself again to her evening lesson, across the valley of the Doubs there came the distant rattle of musketry, and on the horizon near the end of the lake, now almost hidden from view by the rising mists, a hamlet began to flame redly.

David held aside the curtain to look.

"It is Launay des Marais. God help the poor folk over yonder. I must go! It is my duty!"

Noélie pointed to the bed where the Chaplain slept peacefully on, habituated to the noises of war.

"Your duty is here!" she said. And to the maiden's word the wiser elder brother bowed his head.

Presently he looked forth again, and as evening darkened, all the sky above grew red with the uncertain "skarrow" of burning houses, till David, with his hand on his heart, murmured helplessly, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

And again, as if with some involuntary reproach he sighed, "Not peace, but a sword!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ELDER BROTHER WHO WOULD NOT COME IN

IN his soul David Alix mourned over the interruption of his work. His chapels were occupied as stables by the Bavarian cavalry, who respected the holy things of neither Catholic nor Protestant, made pipe-lights of the pulpit Bible, and gave David's plain Genevan gown to the stable-guard for a sleeping-cloak. Only a few women, here and there, full of fears and trembling for what they might find on their return, stole from their homes to this cottage or that other, where David, as in the old times of the Vaudois, his predecessors, was to preach and pray. There they called upon their God, and with low and trembling voices offered to Him a sacrifice of praise. Once even, in the house of Madame Virginie at Mouthe, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper had been celebrated. There was hardly a sound as the unspoken prayers went up from the women's anxious hearts. Hardly one of them but had a son under the colours, or, as was the custom of that border country, fighting among the ravines and pine woods "for his own hand." Few were the communicants who knew at the moment

when they tasted the sacred bread and wine, whether their own son (or perhaps several sons) was alive or dead. It brought the tears to David's eyes only to look at these women, whom he had known young and active a few months ago, now prematurely old, sitting close, almost huddling together, the white-bordered Jura "mutch" shaking with the sobs that rent their hearts. Many had already clothed themselves in that black crape, which was to be the uniform of the women of provincial France for so many years — indeed, is so even to this day. But all heads were bowed into wet kerchiefs, save only the mother of David herself, who sat like an image in grey stone, looking resolutely out over the heads of her kneeling sisters, apparently not at all touched with their grief, though really feeling it come nearer to herself than any. No man was present, but towards the close a young man in the uniform of the Mobiles, the chevrons of sergeant on his arm, entered and sat down on a seat near the door. With a brief gesture he refused the bread and wine of communion, though David offered him the emblems with his own hand.

"Some stray soldier of a broken corps," thought David Alix. "Perhaps a Catholic—perhaps a spy. Well, he will learn nothing but 'the Way' here." The young man remained fixed during the service, his eyes on the preacher. But at the close he waited outside, and with the quiet ease of an educated man introduced himself to David Alix.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you in the duties of your office, but I think my name may be interesting to you. I am Ludovic Villars of St.

THE YOUNG MAN REMAINED FIXED DURING THE SERVICE.

Gabriel, in Provence, and I have reason to believe that my father married your mother."

For a moment David was taken aback. He knew not what to answer. The young man went on.

"I am also given to understand that my father died a rich man, and that you are in enjoyment of his wealth. I am an advocate of the bar of Montpellier and (as appeared to be my duty) I have made myself acquainted with all the circumstances. It appears to me that some reparation is due to me. I have educated myself, working at a trade during half the year and studying at a university the other part, while you have been educated at my father's expense. You have spent several years abroad, all without the least exertion on your part."

"Sir, you are mistaken in much that you say," David answered gently. "I will set your mind at rest upon all these questions. But this holy day and the close of the solemn service in which you have seen us engaged, appears to me (as I am sure that upon consideration to you also) to be particularly ill-suited for the discussion of questions of interest."

"Sir," said the other, with the first gleam of a dangerous anger in his voice and a deep, long-contained rage against fate in his eyes, "I do not speak of questions of interest, but of justice. I was brought up in my native town and pointed to by all as the son of a disgraced man. Disgraced my father may have been, but what is certain is that he remained rich. You and not I have reaped the benefit of those riches. I defy you to say that you have not. You have sat at ease alone with your books, while I have been

working with my hands for the poor pence wherewith to pay my college fees."

David threw out his hands with a little sudden gesture in which there was some real pain.

"I am deeply grieved," he said; "it is true that for a time I benefited by the bounty of my mother's second husband, the late Monsieur Henri Villars. But I have repaid into the estate every franc that he spent upon me, as, were I at home, I could speedily convince you."

"What is it, David?" inquired his mother, coming up quickly, as it were summoned by the grave face of the Pastor. "Who is this young man?"

But the sergeant-advocate of St. Gabriel was quite able and exceedingly willing to introduce himself. At the first words the fiery lady sent her son about his business.

"Go in and see the people who are waiting for a word of advice from you—there, in Madame Virginie's. Off with you, and remember to tell that old hypocrite Peazoo that he gets no crumb of bread from me after this. It will teach him to go selling fat fowls to the Prussians. I believe that he fed his chickens with our bread, the old plaster-faced wretch."

The words, as well as the vigorous action of the lady, warned the advocate of Montpellier that in her he had quite a different adversary to deal with.

"You claim to be the son of my late husband, Henri Villars," she began. "Concerning that I know nothing. But this I do know—he left his whole property to me during my lifetime, with reversion to our only daughter Noélie—as indeed he had an

exceedingly good right to do—for it was I who helped him to make that money and to regain the position he had lost. As for you, sir, I have never so much as heard of your existence till this moment."

"Madame," said the advocate, "you will assuredly hear a great deal about me before I shall be content to put up with such an injustice."

"Sir," she said, "I warn you, as a mother once removed, that you will only lose your time."

"There is law in France and I am a French lawyer," came the answer, "though I have worked with my hands to attain that position."

Madame David the Elder, which is to say Madame Henri Villars, smiled a little bitterly at the young man.

"If you care to know, Sergeant, your spirit pleases me, infinitely better than that of some others. For instance, I dare say that you are a far better man than he whom you claim for your father. But that is not what I have to look to. At present all my capital is embarked on a great venture—the saving of my country, or at least of this part of it, from the invader."

"I also have some little claims that way," said the young man, touching the silver of his sleeve. Madame David the Elder smiled with some approval, but when the sergeant of Mobiles made a pointed reference to the peaceful occupations of her son, whose voice could be heard speaking within, she turned upon him fiercely with the words, "Young man, I do not know how it comes about that you are here property-hunting, nor yet what your states of service may be. But if you

are feeding fifty families within the German lines, each one at the risk of your life—if ever you have been as near death as was my son when they thrust him against the wall of this very house in front of which we are talking, with an enemy's firing-party cuddling their cheeks to the stocks of their needle-guns, then—but not till then—you may have a right to compare yourself with Pastor David Alix."

But the fierce old lady had still a shot left in her locker.

"You spoke just now of the law and of taking that which is mine from me. I do not say that in the case of your satisfying me that you are in reality what you claim to be, my daughter and I might not be inclined to give——"

The young man interrupted her sharply. "Thank you, madame," he said with intense irony, "I did not come here to ask for charity, but for my rights. It is all or nothing."

"Then," cried Madame David the Elder, fiercely, "let it be nothing. Henri Villars was a Swiss citizen, and every farthing of which he died possessed is safe within the Confederation of the Twenty-two Cantons. Neither you nor your French law can touch it."

CHAPTER X.

AN ENEMY WITHIN THE GATE

ALOFT in the Château-Farm of Villars Chaumont, looking down on the clear green rush of the narrow Doubs, the Military Chaplain was being read to sleep. This is a feat which, ordinarily, can only be performed by a lady of respectable age, using upon inexpressive poetry that low monotonous voice which is such an excellent thing in the sick-room. The Reverend Mr. Crabbe gives good results, his charming verse being of an even flow. But the *Idylls of the King*, which had been little Noélie's choice, her delightful French accent (as Military Chaplain Falk thought) in pronouncing the English words, an indescribable tang of the sharper northern speech of Edinburgh—for it was her brother who had taught her—together with a certain strangeness in finding himself thus alone with a young girl in the guest-chamber of a Swiss château, all combined to maintain Hermann Falk awake. Not that he attended very closely. On the contrary, he let the voice run on far ahead of the sense, and if he missed the record of any of the deeds of that "noble fellowship of all the Table

Kound," who shall blame him? He was still weak from his wound, tired with the daily dressing of it, and glad to repose a little. Further—and who shall cast the first stone?—there is not a doubt that he paid most attention to the clear-cut profile lifted between him and the window, even though had he looked so far he might have seen the green swelling uplands of the Swiss Jura across the *bassins* (as the inhabitants on both sides of the valley call the lakes which lie at the bottom of the limestone gorges). Everything was fierce, gloomy, war-swept on the French side—farms and villages fuming and desolate, with blackened rafters pointing steeply to the sky. But through the window at which Noélie Villars sat, the Military Chaplain could look upon a brighter scene. It was not till long afterwards that Hermann Falk understood the delicacy of the intention which had transferred him to the side of Chaumont. Here he could look upon soft and happy slopes, meadows and *vergers* descending to the lake's edge, and the untroubled peace of a summer Sabbath morn lying upon the Land of the Red Cross.

Hermann knew little of women. His nature had fitted him more for dealing with men. Even as one of the King's chaplains and a prominent man in Berlin, he had instinctively given himself to the poor in search of work, or working-men just sufficiently misinstructed by their daily newspaper to fancy themselves philosophers and atheists. He was, in the opinion of the highest authorities, the best chaplain in all the armies. Even the stout old King had by this time heard of and mourned for his wounded counsellor,

laid by the heels on the same neutral territory which guarded more than 80,000 of the unfortunate army of Bourbaki. Small wonder that the Military Chaplain felt the strangeness of his position.

Presently the girl looked up.

"I do not believe that you have been attending at all!" she said imperiously, making believe to stamp her foot on the cool parqueted floor. "Now tell me what I have just been reading to you about?"

The Military Chaplain was not in the least abashed. He replied promptly with the single line of all the Tennysonian cycle which had remained in his mind.

"*Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable, Elaine the lily maid of Astolat!*"

"There, what did I tell you?" she cried, feigning a pretty quick anger and slapping the leaves of the book together with a disgusted air. "Here have I been wasting time and breath in reading this hard English to you, and you asleep all the time, or pretending, which is worse. Because when Doctor Rheudi comes to-morrow I shall have no good account to give of you. We read about 'Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,' the day before yesterday, and now we are in the middle of the noblest passage of all, that where Arthur forgives the Queen——"

"Ah," said the Military Chaplain calmly, "he forgives her, does he? Then why do not you forgive me if forgiveness is in the air? Why not forgive an old fellow whose hair is not so crisp and yellow as once it was, for thinking that the well-born Reiter von

Lancelot would have been wiser if he had stayed along with his armour in that chamber, high in a tower to the east, in which the Lady Elaine, equally well-born, guarded his sacred shield!"

Noélie was too unpractised in such talk to take all his meaning, but she understood the spirit, and answered contritely, "Forgive you—of course I forgive you. Only you are foolish to say that you are old. Why, our David—my brother, that is—has ten times more grey hairs in his head than you, though yours is often like a haystack before they begin to thatch it over with straw!"

"And pray, my dear nurse, whose fault may that be? Surely you would not, much as you dislike me, venture to reproach a poor wounded man with the disarray of his toilette?"

And that is why Noélie Villars, going to the kitchen somewhat hurriedly for hot water and clean towels, found the refugees whom the prospect of dinner had collected from the outhouses, which the goodwill of her mother caused them to consider as their own, engaged in a heated argument in the kitchen. More than one man had his hand on the side-pocket where he carried his concealed weapon.

The noise was so great that Noélie's footsteps were not heard. She was almost in the kitchen, a large ground-floor apartment, timbered and raftered in the ancient manner, before any of the disputants was in the least aware of her coming.

She heard a voice say, "Chaplain or no chaplain, I tell you the man is a German. Do not the Germans shoot us on sight without asking who or what we are?

It is the law of talion. Why then should not we slay him? Can any of you give me a reason?"

He was answered by half-a-dozen voices. "He is wounded. He is the guest of the lady who out of her goodness, because her heart is with us, gives every man-jack of us shelter, food, protection. He was brought here by our own Pastor David, who feeds our families over yonder, going freely where we dare not set foot!"

By this time Noélie had paused, standing motionless and breathless on the turn of the stairs, for the first time in her life listening eagerly and without shame to that which did not concern her. The next words cleared much of the doubts which still lingered in her mind.

"What is that to me?" cried the first voice. "I have nothing to do with you or your shelter, with rich or poor among you. Whatever these folks do or give out of their abundance, depend upon it they still keep the most and the best for themselves. 'The crumbs that fall from the rich man's table'—pshaw, I know all about them! I do not beg, I take these things as a right—a right which I think not even Madame, the good landlady of this hostelry, would dare dispute. But enough of this. The man is a German, and die he must. What difference does it make to La Petite Flore there, whether he be Pomeranian or Bavarian? Was not one as free with his bullets as the other with his house-burning?"

"Not so long as I am here, Master Advocate!" "Not while I have life in my body or a bullet in my pouch!" cried other voices.

There was, in fact, a great division among them, and doubtless blood would have been shed save for the appearance of Madame herself on the threshold. She came out of the *basse cour*, a basket of eggs in one hand and her arms full of vegetables for the evening *pot-au-feu*. By bending a little Noélie could see her mother standing in the doorway, her sun-bonnet pushed far back on her head, and the sunlight from behind the trees flecking her cheek—a brave, bold, handsome woman, knowing no fear and accustomed to command, paying little heed to other women, and at her ease among all men. Noélie had no fear for her mother. She had seen her deal, not with one only, but with a score of men. Yet there was something about the appearance of this young man, who, in the middle of the paved kitchen-place of Villars Chaumont, cool and dusky, stood as it were at defiance. There passed through her the flash of an incommunicable dislike, mingled with a faint stirring of admiration. Yet his face attracted her too. He was like someone—she could not remember who. That carriage of the head, that air of assurance, at once hostile and picturesque, the watchful eye of a fox, often hunted, but never caught—where had she seen all these qualities? Her father! She blushed with shame at the suggestion even as it crossed her mind. Her father! Had he not been gracious to all the world? She remembered how he used to take her on his knee, and let her rummage in his pockets for sweetmeats. He had amused himself in the train by dividing them into many tiny packets, and hiding them here and there about him, in this pocket and

in that. Sometimes, too (it was all part of the game), he would let a full bag drop, and then join in the scramble when the paper burst, laughing heartily. He would even tie a parcel to Noélie's long curls, and then accuse her of trying to steal his property. These were good days, and why should she remember them, looking at this old-young man in the dress of a sergeant of Mobiles on the floor of her mother's kitchen?

The young man stood his ground, smiling cynically, with a kind of pride of disdain. She had never seen any one, except David, in some great matter of right and wrong, thus brave her mother to her face. But, looking again, Noélie began to notice something harsh and vulgar in the strong lines of the face, something desperate and bad under the confidence of the smile. She felt for the man a strong dislike, bordering on fear. Yet undoubtedly there was something strangely attractive about him too, at least in the eyes of Noélie Villars.

Her mother went to the great table; she handed the vegetables to this one and the other to prepare in haste. For with so many hungry mouths to feed, the business of the château-farm must go forward whatever happened. Then Madame, without once regarding the enemy she knew to be before her, with twelve little clicks, brusque and purposeful, broke a dozen of eggs into a bowl for the omelette of the day. Those who had been chosen as assistants went to their tasks in the midst of the great hush that had fallen upon the kitchen. For a full minute nothing was heard but the scrape of the knife preparing the vegetables

for the pot, and, from the back kitchen, with its narrow-grated windows, the crisp *whisk-whisk* of the fork against the sides of the omelette-bowl.

Nothing gave any hint of the trouble that was so swiftly to befal. Madame turned suddenly on the aggressor, and in a low and concentrated voice she uttered the single word of inquiry, "Well?" (In French the "*Eh, bien?*" is still more defiant and expressive, especially when pronounced, "*Eh, bénni!*" as is the custom of the country.) As Madame said it, the ejaculation sounded instant and energetic as the "Stand and deliver!" of a highwayman.

"Madame," the young man answered, "I do not need to tell you by what right I stand here. You are the widow of my father, Henri Villars of St. Gabriel in Provence. *I* am his only son. I have come to claim my share of the inheritance due to me."

Madame David the Elder never blenched in the least. She only moved a step or two nearer to the young man. And the curious thing is, that though he did not retreat before her, several others in the kitchen instinctively drew back a step. They had known Madame David, as it were, during two lives.

"You have already had your answer," she said. "What then are you doing here? All that is in this place is mine, in trust for my daughter. And these good people will aid me to preserve her rights."

"But," said the young man, "without your daughter to give you a claim you would only have a right to the income of the money. That matter perhaps may be arranged. Things more wonderful have happened."

He turned about and in a louder tone, like one who addresses an audience, cried to the crowd in the kitchen, "True Frenchmen, patriots of the Doubs and Jura, the enemy are shooting you down. They are burning your farms, carrying off your horses and cattle, systematically starving you to death."

At this point a clamour of voices came from the refugees bunched together in a corner. "In this house we have been fed, clad, sheltered, and armed. Shall we stand by Madame David or shall we not?"

Then arose a confused roaring sound, the majority clearly crying out for their benefactors of Villars Chaumont; but the trained voice of the young advocate of St. Gabriel cleft the uproar as easily as a knife cuts cheese.

"Who among you does not see that these folk are betraying you under pretence of helping you? The parson goes day by day into the German lines. No one hinders him. If any one of you did as much, would you not be dangling from a tree or with your brains splattered against the nearest wall. Why did *he* escape when our comrade Le Noir was shot down? Both of them were taken together, judged together. Would you seek the reason? It is up the stairs yonder—a German, a spy, the comrade of your precious pastor, the intimate and confessor of the Emperor William himself—he is in this house. He is in your power. Will you suffer the traitor, the murderer of your parents and children, to escape?"

And as the young man finished his harangue, a woman in black forced her way to his side, dominating the audience. The refugees of Villars Chaumont saw before them the tall figure of La Grande Flore brandishing a *chassepot* and sword-bayonet.

"He shall *not* escape," she cried.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEFENCE OF THE EAST WING

THE attack, apparently sudden, had nevertheless been well concerted, and the death of the Chaplain Hermann Falk resolved upon in advance. There were, indeed, an unusual number of newcomers about the château that day; Madame herself had remarked upon it. But knowing, as she did, all about the great "sweep" which the Germans were making all along the frontier of Switzerland, she naturally put down the increase of her guests to new refugees, *franc-tireurs*, solitary fighters, and the last scrapings, the *débris* of Bourbaki's army; men who had been wilfully "lost," whom the bitter cold had caused to fall out, with frozen hands and toes, along the weary road to Verrières. But though her mind was troubled as to the serving of so many additional mouths, Madame David the Elder had gone out peacefully enough into the gardens and *potagers* of Villars Chaumont, seeking what she could find to make a meal for the strangers.

So well had the matter been arranged that those closest in sympathy with Madame David the Elder were taken wholly by surprise. There was not one

who had the presence of mind to interpose between the *franc-tireurs*, headed by the sometime sergeant of Mobiles, Ludovic Villars, seconded by La Grande Flore, and the staircase leading to the upper rooms, where, in the east wing, lay Hermann Falk. Madame David herself was elbowed out of the way in a moment, in spite of the fact that the old and faithful servants and *habitués* of the house drew round her as if by instinct. Not one of these thought at all of the tragedy which was enacting above, till their mistress reminded them.

"Leave me," she cried. "Is a man, and the friend of David my son, to be falsely accused and cruelly murdered in the house—my house, to the hospitality of which he committed himself?"

Which certainly shows that the Military Chaplain had gained ground and favour since David had brought him up the steep path through the pine-woods that led from the snow-whitened valley of the Doubs to the house of Villars Chaumont.

Nevertheless, at that moment it needed more than sympathy to save the life of the Chaplain of the Colberg Grenadiers. The thought, first prompted by delicacy, of putting the wounded man in the east wing of the chateâu-farm, turned out an exceedingly fortunate one. All the rest of Villars Chaumont was an ancient fortress, rearranged for the wants of an ordinary household of the class and means of the late owner. But the east wing had been specially built by Henri Villars for the needs of his trafficking. It contained, besides his various strong boxes built into the wall, an entire upper storey specially strengthened

for defence. The basement and lower court (store-houses and vaults for the articles which he desired to spare the French authorities the pain of examining at their Customs' bureaux) had all been built wholly without wood and were closed by iron doors. A steel drawbridge, light and easily worked by a few turns of a fly-wheel fixed into the wall, gave access to the building or shut it off. Here Henri Villars, with drawbridge raised like a knight in his castle, had been wont to work far into the night. Sometimes he had slept there as well, indeed, in the very room which the Chaplain was now occupying. It was well, therefore, that the girl, going down to the kitchen for her provision of hot water and towels from the linen cupboard adjoining, paused on the stairs, held motionless by the turmoil below.

It was because of this that Ludovic and La Grande Flore, with their rabble of broken and desperate frontiersmen behind them, stood at the little platform upon which Henri Villars' steel bridge descended, and gazed helplessly into space. Those behind pressed forward, and vigorous and determined resistance on the part of those who stood nearest was required to prevent the pressure from hurling them into the gulf.

Then a voice from a little barred window to the left called out, in clear girlish tones, yet with something of her mother's authority in it, "Stand back there, or I fire!" Ludovic Villars instantly raised his rifle to his shoulder, and would have let go without question at the grating. But La Grande Flore, in spite of her madness recognising the voice of her daughter's friend, threw up the muzzle of the *chassepot*, so that the

bullet lost itself harmlessly among the chimney-pots. Standing there the young man could easily see that, approached from this direction, the east wing was as impregnable as the architect his own father, had meant it to be.

"Back there," he shouted, "we must finish our German in some other way."

A few struggled forward to make sure that the case was as impossible as the leaders said. In more than one case these inquiring spirits came very near to breaking their bones on the paved court below. But at last the most eager was satisfied and all retreated, only, however, to find themselves faced by Madame David the Elder. For a moment she had been swept aside. The casual thrust of an elbow in the chest had angered her terribly. This woman, so long accustomed to command, was hurt in her pride of house and people. As soon as the kitchen was clear she had promptly rallied half-a-dozen of the men-servants, carles dour and ill to drive. These were they who had helped her with her underground railway, by which, in spite of authorities both cantonal and Teutonic, arms and ammunition had been conveyed to the occupied districts. Such men, once on their guard, had little difficulty in breaking up the retreat of the armed rabble who followed La Grande Flore and the ex-sergeant of Moblots. They barred the descent to the kitchen and lower storerooms of the house. With a barrier of bayonets and loaded rifles they turned the ebb of flight at right angles across the hall and down the wide steps which led from the front door.

Only one lingered within, fixed on the verge of the

'BACK THERE,' HE SHOUTED, 'WE MUST FINISH OUR GERMAN IN SOME OTHER WAY.'

little landing-stage from which the steel bridge had been removed not a moment too soon. Ludovic Villars, rifle in hand, stood still, sullenly angered that his destined prey was escaping him. Whether that prey was to be the German whom he loathed by race and temperament, or also the half-sister, the daughter of his father, whom he had learned to hate as his supplanter, even the young man could hardly have told. He stood dumbly gazing at the barrier of emptiness, so narrow but so efficient. Then the door opened and there stood before him, as it had been, his second self in the form of a young girl. Noélie had the Chaplain's revolver still in her hand. But at the sight of the young man so near her that they could almost have clasped hands across the gulf of air, she involuntarily let the weapon drop to her side. They saw their own images, as it had been, in a glass darkly. Only to the young man his sister seemed taller and more lissom, with smaller features, and her dark hair of a duskier, crisper luxuriance. But the eyes were the same, of an infinite dark grey, though Noélie had them less closely set together and without the eyebrows meeting above, thick and lowering, sure sign of a gloomy and jealous temperament.

Brother and sister stood thus for a moment, face to face, the *chassepot* twitching in the young man's hands. Half-involuntarily it rose half-way to his shoulder, but instantly it fell again. He could not commit a murder so unprovoked and so brutal. To clear an obstacle out of his way in the heat of a fight, even though that obstacle were a woman, had appeared to him possible; but standing alone, with only a couple of yards or so

of space cutting him off from his nearest relative in the world, his sister's death suddenly presented itself to him as an impossibility. He had not thought of it so before. Fate rather than Nature had made him bitter and cruel. Men and things had dealt hardly with him. He had turned the mangle with small blistered hands during the years that his father was making a great fortune in Switzerland. After that he had been an apprentice zinc-worker and plumber, risking his neck among the crumbling tiles on lofty housetops. Education, hardly wrenched by self-sacrifice from the grip of circumstance, had only embittered him the more. He trembled with anger at the thought of David Alix in a foreign university, all his needs supplied without effort or desert from his father's money. Still more he hated this girl who was to be the heiress of the farms and vineyards, the scrip and share, together with the finest fields of "*vert*" (which is to say, the wormwood out of which absinthe is made) between Coulon and Verrières—all that of rights ought to have been his own.

Ludovic Villars turned and went out of the house which had been his father's, equally heedless of the angers of Madame and the threatening arms of her faithful escort. The young man was drowned in a dream of the things that might have been. He was the natural rebel—born, bred, and long dangerously maturing, the Anarchist in action, such as at that period only France produced. Of him his old professor at the Lycée of Montpellier had said, after he had led his class-mates into some desperate scrape (that is, as such things go in France), "Elève Villars,

you will either die President of the Council or on the scaffold; *I think the latter!*"

He had carried this dangerous reputation to excess as a student, having already been twice imprisoned for the violence of his opinions, by which means he had lost his *bourse* at the university, and with it his last claim to normal respectability as a provincial lawyer. To do young Villars justice, it was not entirely for selfish enrichment that he desired so greatly to serve himself heir to his father's estates. He had that "conceit of himself" which comes early to a man who can always be sure of making his own living. He knew, however, that whether under empire or any immediate republic, success would be achieved only at the cost of his published and declared convictions. Whatever, therefore, he could wring from the hated *bourgeoisie* would be used to serve "The Cause." True, he had as yet no clear idea what The Cause meant, though in the main he was at one with the men who were plotting the Communist risings in Paris. But meantime, there were certain obvious and cheaply popular cries to which he could attach himself. Such at present was "Death to the Germans!"

This would serve excellently for a siege of Villars Chaumont. He had not been able to bring himself personally to commit murder, even though he felt his quarrel to be just. But in the hither-and-thither of the siege of a defended house, who knew what might not happen? Behind those bars was the German, who of a certainty must die for the sake of old François, little Louis, and many others. There were, besides, his step-mother and his half-sister, by whose

disappearance The Cause would gain greatly. All things were possible at such times.

He spoke of the plans he had formed against Villars Chaumont to one, Breslin, whom he had chosen as his second in command.

Breslin was a huge, square-shouldered brute, with a kind of rudimentary facility of ruse and trick, much like the instinct of a wild animal evading attack or lying in wait. His great strength made him feared by all that gathering of broken and outlaw men. Yet he yielded at once to the trained intelligence of Ludovic Villars, who became to Breslin as a god, all the more that his skill as a handicraftsman was far beyond that of the forester, trained only in woodcraft and smuggling.

"*Death to the Prussian!*" The guerilla fighters made that the watchword of their camp in the thin straggling pine-woods above Brenets on the French side.

"I have at least got something out of Chaumont yonder," growled the giant Breslin, exhibiting with pride a Red Cross badge and proceeding to buckle it about his arm. He gazed at his loot with a confident smile.

"And what good do you think that trinket is going to do you?" demanded his captain scornfully. They lay together, prone on their faces, a little hastily scraped breastwork under their chins, just sufficient to turn a low-flying bullet. They nibbled at what remained of Madame's bread out of their knapsacks, for the enemy was too near for them to risk building a fire; there would be no soup in the pot that night.

They were on the wrong side of the frontier for any such provender as might have been obtained at Chaumont.

"The good it is going to do me?" chuckled the huge smuggler. "Why, Captain, what need to ask that? If I am caught by the pigs of Prussians, I will get rid of my gun and cartridge-pouch. Then, look you, I will snap this about my arm, and lo, I am under the protection of the Geneva Convention! It was a priest who is out with Japy's band, he put me up to the wrinkle."

Ludovic Villars laughed scornfully; then suddenly thrusting out his hand, he pulled his lieutenant's head down with a jerk as a bullet of a needle-gun went ripping past immediately overhead, snipping the smaller branches and bringing down the pine-needles upon them in a thin shower. The men behind growled fiercely, asking to be allowed to reply to the marksman.

"No use, lads, it is only some outpost trying the range," Ludovic explained. "I am sure that no one could possibly see us here."

And indeed, under the leading of the ex-smuggler, Breslin, they had entered the wood at the top and worked their way down its whole length without stirring a twig, till they were once more looking across the valley in the direction of Chaumont.

"There," said Ludovic sternly, "Master Genevan Convention Breslin, where would you have been with that badge on your arm if I, Ludovic Villars, had not pulled that stupid gourd on your shoulders down among the fir-cones?"

"But I meant when—if, that is, I were taken by the Prussians!" Breslin explained.

"And what, think you, would the Prussians care if you were armour-plated with Swiss badges? You might just as well stick a dozen Pernod labels over you. They have the red cross also. Why, the first Prussian officer would take one look at your hands, and then, ho, for the *peloton* of execution and a dozen bullets through your thick skull!"

"But," argued Breslin, "after all, there are worse deaths—ready, present, fire! That is child's play to what these rascally peasants over yonder would give a man if they caught him at their chicken-coops and rabbit-hutches."

"True, Breslin, my most wise friend," said Ludovic, "beating to death with sticks is no cheerful end, neither to be trampled to a jelly with *sabots*. But, after all, twenty years in a model Swiss dungeon, with no one to speak to, and all the time to be dreaming of the world without, the happy people there, the sunshine, the birds flying across the open sky, and the rabbits bunting about, with their white tails twinkling in the twilight glades—ah, my friend, what think you of that?"

Breslin turned pale, because such things were his life, and he looked anxiously at his commander.

"What, then, am I to do?" he groaned.

"Throw your badge into the bushes there, and if at any time you cannot escape, why, kill as many as you can and then take care to keep the best cartridge for yourself to finish with."

He snapped the retaining spring of his revolver and

turned the six cartridges out on his palm. "Observe Number Six," he said grimly; "that hard-bitten fellow is Ludovic Villars' single ticket to eternity. It will send him, when need is, a long, long journey in the dark, aye, and introduce him to much more than your friend the priest or my brother the parson wots of."

But in his heart he was planning, at the first opportunity, a flight to Paris, by way of Lyons. Strange things were being whispered. Some said that Le Grand Soir, the wondrous Eve of Freedom and Universal Revolt, was at hand. Ludovic resolved not to be behindhand. At the first check he would disband his men and take the road for Lyons, where he had friends among the leaders of revolt. He knew his own abilities. They would have need of him when they hoisted the Red Rag of the Desperate. No one should be fitter to carry it high than Ludovic Villars.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW THAT WALKETH IN DARKNESS

PASTOR DAVID ALIX continued his work, and through the lengthening days of spring the whole district of the Jurassic Doubs knew him as its visible Providence. No barque set out from Brenets, or skiff traversed the Bay of Pargots, without a cargo of his bounties. Outlying upland farms, burned and clean-swept, knew him. Behind the shelter of an outhouse, or in lee of a limestone rock, a woman or a hunger-thinned stripling stood on the look-out for *Not' Pasteur*. In snowy weather his tall form could be seen for miles against the white. Even the Germans tolerated his comings and goings. For was he not the bearer of a *laisser passer* of unexampled power, with "Von Bismarck" scrawled in one corner and counter-signed "Von Moltke" in the other—the whole bearing the seal of the new "Imperial Chancellerie"!

Not even the Bavarians could help obeying that, as yet, unknown power. When it went from hand to hand among their officers, they fingered it as the devout Roman Catholic does a saintly relic. Yet these were the men the most feared in the country.

The Shadow that Walketh

The smoke of Bazeilles, the killing of women and children among the flames, had surrounded the scrubbing-brush-crested helmets with that kind of hateful halo which soon becomes a legend of fear.

But they saluted David as he went by—even grim, silent, old Van der Tann himself moving his hand upwards as if acknowledging a good soldier of some neutral power. Uhlans galloping rapidly in the twilight would look curiously at the shadow flitting along the forest edges. Then, recognising the "Genevan" *pasteur* of the lofty protections, they would toss their black and white pennons at him by way of greeting, and vanish at full speed.

But in the Château-Farm of Villars Chaumont for the moment a great Sabbath quiet rested on everything within and without, tempered by the anxiety with which the inmates thought of David walking his dangerous ways across the valley, where the favour of the Germans brought upon him the suspicion of the more reckless Free Companies.

"'Blessed are the meek!'" said Hermann Falk to Noélie, as he sat reclined in the great chair of the banker—that, indeed, in which he died. He could see David just climbing the hill towards Villars Chaumont—his feet weary with the hard limestone and the long slippery ways.

He looked up and waved a hand towards them. Instantly through the window-casement started the little white signal of Noélie's kerchief. She loved her brother, and these two mutually understood each other, as the mother who bore them both never had and never would.

"'Blessed are the meek,'" repeated the Army Chaplain, as his eyes followed his friend's slender figure, "'they shall inherit the earth.' So the Book says, and for that reason *I* shall never inherit more than the six foot by two common to all the race."

From the window-seat Noélie lifted the misty quiet of her eyes upon him, as he sat, one large strong hand whitened by sickness laid laxly on the arm of her father's great chair.

"You are good," she said, with her usual thoughtful directness; "you are the best patient I have ever nursed—better even than our David. For if he is not watched, he will be up and his clothes on, if one leaves the room for a minute. If you stay away a quarter of an hour, you will likely catch sight of him half-way down to the ferry at Chaillaxon! But you have been content!"

"Yes," said the Military Chaplain, very gravely, and without looking at his nurse, "I have been content."

The girl flushed a little with pleasure, though indeed he had spoken rather brusquely. Then she threw a light fly-line with maidenly cunning, to catch a greater compliment.

"Of course," she said softly, as if to herself, "I have not nursed you as your own mother would have done——"

The Chaplain laughed aloud.

"Thank goodness," he said. "My mother would have plastered me and pottaged me every five minutes by the clock. There would have been no rest for my body because of her remedies, nor for my

soul because of her tongue. She has not had a chance at me like this for twenty years—not since my first duel at Heidelberg, when I fought the Captain of the Badeners."

"A duel—you—and a clergyman?"

Somehow Noélie's eyes were shining, though her words were reproachful.

"Ah, dear lady," smiled the Chaplain, "not one, but twenty. It is part of the curriculum. Not a professor worth anything but will show you his battle-scars between his second and third tumblers—aye, and be proud of them too!"

"But were you then studying for the ministry of the Word?" asked Noélie, the memory of the young Protestant students she had seen at Montauban coming back to her. She could see them walking singly with their books under the great trees of the *Chaussée*, or in quiet twos and threes taking the air in the college garden—all gentle, still of demeanour, quiet of speech—not at all like this Goth of the North, who in spite of being a minister duly ordained, had the speech of a commander of horse and carried on his shoulders the head of a Viking.

David entered, and stood on the threshold a moment smiling at the two before him—Noélie on the window-seat, her hands on her lap, and Hermann Falk in the banker's chair, looking strange in his bandages, with the weathered "hale" all gone from his face.

Only with David did Noélie ever show her real spontaneity of character. She rose and ran to him, eager as when she was still a child, to clasp her hands about his neck. He kissed her gently on the fore-

nead, looking down upon her from his height with the gentlest eyes. Then, without moving, he reached out his hand to Hermann Falk in his chair.

"Has this baby of ours been taking good care of you?" he asked, as Noélie went off to get him something to eat. The kitchen was now more free of strange guests. The great "sweep" of the Germans had carried the bands before them northward, while the lurking solitary fighters had followed behind, furtively gliding from tree to tree till they could again come near enough to harass the enemy's rearguard and outposts.

The country opposite Villars Chaumont was, for a little while, quiet. Only many farms were laid waste or plundered. Fugitives still lurked in all the woods. Women starved in the villages. David had seen all this that day, but once at home his care and his love were for those he had left there.

Gravely he counted the beats of the Chaplain's pulse, asked what the surgeon had said that day as to his wound, and sat down beside him, to give him, what Hermann Falk so earnestly desired the latest news of the war.

There was an armistice—so much was certain. And though that did not yet include the disturbed departments of the Doubs and Jura, assuredly that also would not be long delayed. There would be peace, glorious for the Germans, and perhaps on as good terms as the French had any right to expect.

"Ah," said Hermann Falk, "there speaks the Switzer! What would your mother say to this?"

"I know—I know," David Alix answered sadly. "She thinks of her Alsace—I of my poor folk down yonder——"

David sighed and was silent a moment, looking out of the window at the rugged ledges of the Franche Comté above Chaillaxon.

"I suppose I *am* a bad patriot to my adopted country," he said pensively. "If it be possible for a man like you to conceive such a thing, Hermann, I am a man who prefers the poorest peace to the best war that was ever waged!"

The Military Chaplain was not at all so deeply moved as David had expected.

"You forget," he said, "that I have seen you stuck up against a cottage wall over there at Mouthe——"

"Ah," David interrupted, "that was in the way of my duty. That is very different. It is easy to die. It is hard to kill your fellow-men, whom God has made, in a quarrel of kings and emperors!"

"Your own folk did not think so over yonder at Morat, some little time ago! Nay, they were so fond of fighting that after they had no enemies left to conquer at home, they took service with every king who had a sack of dollars, and every tyrant who wanted a faithful guard."

"I know," said David Alix. "'No money, no Swiss'—the proverb has run round the world. Only such men did not come from *my* city, which is Geneva, nor carry in their hearts the faith of my Master, who is——"

"John Calvin," interrupted the Military Chaplain. "Why, man, more wars have been waged because of

that master of yours than by all the kings, emperors, and princes now upon the earth!"

"I did not mean John Calvin, Hermann Falk," said the Pastor, "as well you do know. But vour Master and mine."

The Military Chaplain moved uneasily. His religion, equally real and deep, did not express itself so easily as David's.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, startled as if David had used a rough camp word—"yes, I understand. I beg your pardon, Pastor David."

Secretly he felt that between men who knew each other so well—as it were both of them spiritual experts—his jest should not have been put down with such a hammer-stroke of authority.

But Hermann was the last man in the world to bear malice. He was a German with strong patriotic feelings. He considered that the cause of his Emperor-King was also the cause of God. But he was his friend's guest, and it mattered little to him though David Alix was, what he often called him, a mere Republican, or that he seemed to think that the Bible consisted only of the Scriptures of the New Testament. Accordingly he changed the subject.

"Any news of our kind friends the 'bush-whackers'?" he said.

It was now David's turn to show a certain uneasiness. He looked out of the window and drummed his thin fingers on the table. Hermann, who knew him of old, watched him, smiling quietly.

"Well, what is it? Out with it, my David," he said.

"I fear," said the Pastor at last, "that the bloody

and deceitful men are again on our track. To-day, as I came from Lazon to Les Collines, I felt that I was not alone. The feeling haunted me till it became an obsession. Always, behind dykes and hedges of willow and thorn, something glided. I have had the feeling before, when returning by night, but never in broad daylight. Hitherto he has been the shadow that walketh in darkness, but to-day I saw him under God's own sun."

"And could you make the fellow out—the rascal?" growled the Army Chaplain fiercely between his teeth.

"It was the man who calls himself the son of my mother's husband—Ludovic Villars. I saw him spying me as I went my rounds, and once when I stopped and walked back towards him, he disappeared into the thickets of the woods of Vercel."

"Would that I had been at his tail," groaned Hermann Falk from the banker's great chair, "or Sergeant Schram—he is the better shot. He would have tickled your good kinsman, I warrant."

"I desire no man's hurt," said David, "not even when he desires mine."

"No," cried the Military Chaplain vehemently, "I dare say not. But you are not such a fool as to think that it is *you* he is after—no, nor even me, the Prussian. I am only the bait in the trap. He will gain nothing by killing either of us. He would lose his popularity by slaying you. But if your sister and your mother were killed in the tumult of an assault by night on this hospital of mine—why, who would be the heir?"

"He could never be so wicked," cried David.

"Such a monster does not exist in any Christian country."

The Chaplain shrugged his shoulders.

"A Christian country," he said. "It looks like it over yonder, does it not? Your people and mine have not too many stones to cast one at the other—but we Germans at least do our killing regularly and in order of battle."

"But I was shot at," said David; "therefore he must wish to kill me also. I heard the bullet whistle overhead, and saw the puff of smoke rise from among the bushes."

"I wager there is something behind all that," mused Hermann Falk. "I wish I had my pipe, so that I could think things out."

"And why not?" said David. "Wait a moment. I can bring you one of my stepfather's, and there is good tobacco among my mother's stores, I know."

"Hush," murmured the Chaplain, raising his hand and listening eagerly, "there is Noélie's step on the stairs. She does not like tobacco."

And for the first time for many days David, remembering his friend of old, laughed aloud.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMMANDANT

ALICE BRANTE, schoolmistress at Les Pargots, a certain little, ringleted, pouting-lipped girl, with the eyes of a Persian cat in the twilight, something between the blue and the grey, though born in France, was a very different patriot from her neighbour, La Petite Flore, across the lake.

But it was to her official cottage, overlooking the water-lily beds of the Bay of Pargots, that La Petite Flore had brought her mother for a few days after the shooting of Hermann Falk at Villars Chaumont. The house had once been a small smuggling inn, frequented by the "runners" of watches and Swiss jewellery, in the days before Henri Villars had come from Provence to organise and centralise the trade further up the lake. The place had been officially reconstructed, but still possessed its original two doors, the front being in French territory, while the back opened out upon the green pastures of Switzerland.

This little schoolmistress was also a pastor's daughter, born in the next parish to that in which David's father had done his ministrations. Left early an orphan, she had been gathered in by the good man

and his wife, though by the latter with something of an ill grace. Nevertheless, she had received and educated the little orphan girl until the death of David Alix the elder changed all things.

Then the Provençal banker declared that he would not have his house turned into an orphan asylum. He was willing, he added, to do anything in reason for the pretty little Protestant, but it must be at a distance from Villars Chaumont. Henri Villars was as good as his word, and placed Alice Brante in a good school at Lausanne, from which in due time she went to the Normal College for Government instructors at Geneva.

She was ever an affectionate little girl, with hair of copper and pale gold. Her face was set in tight little curls which had this peculiarity—where they sprang from the fair under skin, they appeared of a deep copper hue which gradually lightened to the upper curve, but beyond that they fell like little waves on a quiet shore, in arch ringlets and sprays, which foamed on her brow in pale amber gold, so light that the wind lifted and laid them with every breath, or even the mere movement she made in walking.

Madame up yonder at Villars Chaumont had never liked her, though she had not yet shown herself openly hostile. But David had always regarded Alice as his little sister, and often found his way to the door of the white school-house under the great chestnuts, with the Bay of Pargots and the broadest part of the lake stretching out under the westward-looking windows. Beneath was a floating plain of

water-lilies, anchored in masses, moored by their thick green cables like some fairy fleet lying becalmed with all sail set. When the gusts came hard from the westward they rolled and swayed like merchantmen outside a river bar. But when it was still, as mostly at this perfect season of the year, then beginning with the white fringe of the Bay of Pargots, the eye took in a wonderful scheme of colour. Alice had often tried to fix it on paper with her poor cheap colours—hard gritty cakes rubbed down on slabs of china ware—the whole supplied by the Cantonal Government for the purpose of colouring maps. But she never got half-way through without disaster. She stamped her little foot at herself as at a stupid scholar, tore up the result, and clattered the materials topsy-turvy into a drawer. For mademoiselle sometimes was a stormy little person, for all her meek airs, as the pupils who aroused her soon found out.

Alice Brante stood at her door, wondering whether she should go a-visiting, but she soon fell a-dreaming over the beauty spread before her. The white of the lilies in the Bay of Pargots dropped suddenly at the water's edge into a pale blue, which became darker as it receded, till between the capes it was a mere deep sapphire line with little wave-flecks of fire upon it. Beyond, Alice saw a marvel, as it had been a huge emerald with a glowing heart of yellow fire. It was the Lake of Brenets on its couch of Jura lime-stone, with the sunshine plunging darts of flame into it, searching out its depths. Only in these lakes of the high Jura can such a thing be seen.

This, of course, little Alice did not know. She had

only seen the great Lake Leman, stretching every way beneath Lausanne, blue or grey according to the sky above it. That was her ocean, and though she knew that the sea of the geographies was larger, she really could not imagine it without the Alps of Savoy rising abruptly on the other side.

Behind her, the little house was cool and sweet, while through its soft duskiness stole airs from across the tableland of the French Jura. Alice, the little schoolmistress, sighed. Indeed, she had had her share of the anxieties of war. The elder children of Les Pargots had with one mind stayed away from school —the boys employed in running mysterious messages and the girls helping their mothers with the extra cooking, which somehow or other arose out of these missions on which their brothers were despatched.

"To think," said Alice pitifully to herself, "that the Inspector of the Educational Committee will be here in a month, and not more than a dozen scholars of the 'Grands' ready to meet him. If it were not for the little ones, I should certainly get a bad mark on my certificate. But if he is a kind man, he will look at the register of attendances—then he will understand. I cannot teach children who will not come to be taught."

There was certainly some slight comfort in this thought, but all the same the great eyes with the dark pupils, which waxed and waned according to the light, were often velvet-soft with tears.

The little school-house on the frontier, where the Doubs sways away into the "Franche Compté," almost abutted on the Mountain of Grillot, a rough

mountain-shoulder, round the corner, as it were, from the main valley. It afforded a safe refuge, in ordinary times, for Free Fighters and "solitaries"—chiefly because the German patrols and columns of punishment had to cross the Doubs in order to reach it, and only a strong or very mobile force would venture to leave a deep and difficult river between them and retreat.

In itself the cottage above Les Pargots did not seem a very safe place of abode for a girl, young and innocent, in times so uncertain. But Alice, the little schoolmistress, was not really alone. The stables of the ancient inn had been converted into a farm-dwelling, and though one end of the school-house abutted on the pines of the mountain side, the dwelling of Jean Heller and his wife Anna held Alice's cottage in a friendly embrace of corn-sheds and hay-chalets which surrounded it on three sides.

Jean Heller was an old soldier. He had made the Solferino campaign, and, as a recruit, that of the Crimea also. He was of the department of the Isère, near to Grenoble, and like many of his countryfolk, a Protestant. But at the close of his service he had retired with the grade of sergeant-major, to marry a Swiss wife and to cultivate the farm she had brought him. Long a naturalised citizen of the Swiss Republic, he had thought little more of the Isère, and though he daily saw his native land, he had had, till this last year, little desire to revisit it. His own people were all dead. He was perfectly happy with Anna, his plump, red-cheeked wife, whom it was his humour to treat in military fashion, calling her "Commandant"

at every other word, and when he went or came, pretending to stand at attention, and saluting seriously and with ceremony as often as she made her will known.

At first Anna had not understood this pleasantry, and many had been the pitched battles which she had fought, because he would thus persist in making her ridiculous "before people." But Jean held to his point and gradually won. By degrees Anna habituated herself to her husband's extraordinary humour, and even in her heart excused him by saying that, after all, his hardships might have left something very much worse in his system.

Finally all thought of anything strange passed away, so much so that Madame Heller often wondered what strangers were laughing at when they came first about the farm of Les Bassettes.

As they had no children, the little schoolmistress had become to this well-matched pair almost as their own child. They had often besought her to come across the court to their house. But there was a Governmental rule not to be trifled with, which bade the teachers to inhabit the houses allotted to them by the Confederation, to keep such residences in good repair, and on no account to let, sublet, or otherwise alienate them, for any period however short. Alice, therefore, had always declined the good Hellers' offers to dwell with them. But Jean, not to be beaten, made use of his talent for carpentry, and with some hundreds of old pine boards constructed a covered passage which ran from the eastern door of the schoolhouse, through the great barn, turned the angle of a fodder shed, and thence by a door straight into the

kitchen-place of Les Bassettes. This same secret passage pleased him greatly. He was proud of it and induced even the hasty tongue of Madame Anna to keep silence about it. His corn and hay were piled up against the planking, and no one in the household, looking through the great doors of the barn, could have the least idea of the covered way which lay underneath the yellow mounds of rustling straw and lavender-scented hay. Both Jean and Anna took a pride in the thought that the lonely little schoolmistress was in some degree their guest, and had a part in their house, in spite of the Government and all its regulations.

"Faith o' my heart," said Anna Heller, cleaning a long stirring-spoon on her aproned knee, "she must stay in her own house, must she? By herself—all these long winter nights! The man in Berne who made that law should be stuck up here all alone, with nothing but six feet of snow-drift and a map of Siberia to keep him warm—then he might learn how to make laws!"

"Yet I dare wager, Commandant," said her husband, mechanically saluting, "there are not a few in these valleys who would be glad to come and bear our little Alice company of an evening about the lonely fire, or hear her sing——"

"Alice Brante is too good a girl to think of any such foolishness," interrupted his wife, "and I beg that you shall not put it into her head. Besides, she is too proud! She thinks a great deal of herself—and rightly. Her book, her knitting, and her piano—what more does she want?"

Here the ex-soldier interrupted humbly, with the sign agreed upon between them when he wished to address a remark personal to his superior officer.

"Go on," cried Anna, giving him an impatient slap as she passed, "never was there such a man! He does not know what he would be at, and yet he is for ever troubling us with this nonsense of saluting. Hands down, I tell you, and out with what you want to say!"

Jean saluted again, but the long wooden stirring-spoon made a motion in the direction of his head. He knew better than to hesitate.

"It seems to me," he said, in a distant, reminiscent tone, playing meanwhile with a chip that had fallen from the hearth, and letting the words slowly distil themselves from his lips, "that, some time long ago, I can remember a girl who did not object to a little company of an evening sitting in the chimney-corner of her father's house, not remote from here, listening to the crickets chirp, and the yet sweeter melody of the old man snoring stoutly in his closet with the door open——"

The wooden spoon fell this time on Jean's bushy head and about his shoulders, neither of which he tried in the least to shield. Only at each resounding thump, his hand rose to his brow with unfailing submission, and when she had finished his punishment, he said without a single flicker of a smile on his grave face, "Thank you, my commandant!"

At which the buxom woman, flushed with her exertions, was compelled, in spite of herself, to laugh. Then suddenly she flung herself at her husband,

catching him by the ears, crying out that of all men he was the most impossible, teasing, villainous, and delightful. For an instant Jean threw aside his mask of soldierly obedience, caught his wife by the waist, and whirled her round the kitchen in a wild dance, from which the good woman emerged red and breathless, catching at her decent white headgear, and pushing at vagrant curls to stow them out of sight underneath.

"Have you no sense, Jean, at your age? You ought to know better. Just look at me—I pray of you to regard well. And what would any one have thought had they seen you?"

"Why, that you were lucky in your choice of a husband, Anna Heller!" cried her husband.

"Be off with you, I say!"

She caught at the bar of iron, with a hook at the end, by means of which the fire was kept in order and various matters stowed away up in the chimney to be out of harm's way.

"Come a little nearer, lad, and I will comb thy locks for thee!" she cried. "I will have no more of this. Mademoiselle Alice may come through that door at any moment!"

A peal of laughter, with a little nightingale's *jug-jug* deep in the throat, broke off the sentence—a laugh which often made those who heard it start and turn to look at Alice Brante.

"I have been watching you all the time," she said, running to Madame Anna; and then compassionately, "Has he been naughty again?"

"Naughty—that is no word for him," cried the

housewife, holding up her hands; "I am fairly wearied to death with his foolishness."

"Yet it seemed to me that you also were laughing?"

"And, I pray you, who could help it?" cried Madame, still intent on her damaged cap of fine white muslin trimmed with *batiste*. "He does not play fair, look you, that Jean. He has learned in some ill company to keep his face straight, and laugh not at all, or maybe he is too lean to laugh. And—ah, I cannot help it, do you see? For I am fat. He is a rascal, a good-for-nothing, and why I married him at all I cannot make out to this day!"

Jean's hand went up.

"Well, what is it?" said his wife. "Be serious for once—before Mademoiselle!"

"Why you married me, my commandant," said Jean reflectively, "*that* I cannot tell. But well do I know why I married you!"

"And why?" demanded Anna, making another demonstration with the long-handled wooden spoon.

"Because, my commandant, you ordered me!" said Jean, gravely saluting.

The spoon would doubtless have fallen again, and perhaps the hooked bar of iron as well (though that not with much deadly force, you may be sure). But Alice begged her friend off, and pacified and delighted both combatants by declaring that at her house she had not a crumb of anything, and that in her need she had come to ask them for a bite of supper.

Instantly all was changed in the mood of the farmer and his wife of Les Bassettes. Their mock quarrel-

someness, these simple innocent jests of the country-side, which in these last days Jean had forced himself to wear almost threadbare in order to keep up his spirits, passed instantly away. Jean busied himself with the fuel for the fire, and went down to the cellar for a bottle of country wine out of his own vineyard. Anna paid visits to her pantry and bustled with pots and pans about the fireplace.

Like all the women of the Swiss Jura, she had a natural gift of cookery. A pleasant place was the kitchen of the farm of Bassettes on that summer night. The heat of the charcoal on the hearth was rather pleasant than otherwise at that altitude. It was dusk, and they lighted no light, because of the midges and flies. But the table was laid near the open window. The great doors were flung wide, and from where they sat they could look down into the deepening shadows purpling in the pale glitter of the *bassins*. These were now dimmed with a milky iris of mist, but white houses looked out clearly enough here and there on the favoured slopes of that peaceful land. The bare summits to the west, however, were red as blood, as the sun went down on the wreck of what had once been one of the fairest provinces of that dear land where Jean had been born.

They fell silent in the twilight, not eating much, but all struck by one thought. At the sound of a foot-step at the door, however, Jean started up. It was a time when no man heard the fall of foot, whether of man or beast, without at once setting himself to find out the cause.

"The blessing of the God of Jacob be on this house and on all that are in it!"

They knew the voice, as who did not. Heartily they cried to come in. Smilingly Jean brought a chair, and his wife set the table for another place, as David Alix entered, a kind of gladness on his pale face. They set him between them, with Alice, grown suddenly rather silent, opposite, her head silhouetted against the opaline light of the doorway.

"You will abide and take the worship with us, Pastor!" said Jean.

"I will abide," David Alix answered, as he took his seat. He had disposed his great game-bag in a corner. The wallet was flat and empty now, though in the morning he had crossed the lake with it too full for the straps to buckle about it.

"And you, little sister?" he asked, looking across the table to Alice Brante, "has your flock teased you as much as mine to-day?"

He could not see the expression on her face, for she had her back to the misty light which filled the valleys, but she answered readily enough.

"Pastor, my work is little and foolish compared to yours. You give bread to the hungry. You speak the Word. You lead the suffering heavenward. You prepare the dying. Yours is the greatest work to which any man could put hands—and I wonder that any dare!"

"Indeed," said the Pastor, sighing, "such is my own daily wonder. I feel that I am even as that Uzzah who, at the threshing-floor of Nachon, did put forth his hand and touch the ark of God when the oxen

shook it. I marvel that I am not stricken even as he."

And they looked on him open-mouthed, for all in that land on both sides of the *bassins* considered him as holy. If *he* were a sinner, how would it fare with the others?

As they sat silent, waiting upon his words, there came through the open door the hoot of an owl out of the darkness of the pine-forest that scrambled up the mountain. Jean, whose keen ear detected that the sound came from nothing that wore feathers, made as if to rise, but the Pastor stretched out his hand and bade him keep his seat.

"All is well," he said, smiling quietly, "it is only my invisible protector."

And because David Alix had borne what seemed a charmed life during these months of storm and death, a thrill of awe fell upon all three as the hoot of the owl came again, thrice repeated, from the wood.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVENING SACRIFICE

IN the Doubs and the Jura the disturbance among the people lasted longer than elsewhere in France. In those early summer days of 1871, when the great struggle against the Commune was going on about Paris, these two frontier departments were, and had to be, a law to themselves. The Germans had retreated to the north. The soldiers and "Mobiles" of the district were assisting M. Thiers to bring the stubborn workmen of Belleville and Montmartre to their senses—and to the camp of Sartory. *Débris* of broken armies, plunderers, and vulturine followers of battle-fields, deserters of all arms, Communists and terrorists fleeing from the great towns of Lyons or Marseilles when the Red Flag had failed, or insurgents too late to gain entrance into Paris—swarmed everywhere, and became the curses of the two Jurassic departments.

It was no wonder, therefore, that David Alix needed divine protection in his work of aiding the helpless on both sides of the *bassins* and upon the table-lands of the Doubs. He had, however, learned by this time that the Shadow that Walked in Darkness

was, to him, beneficent—though he did not yet know the extent of the debt he owed to that faithful guard.

As they sat in the kitchen of the farmhouse of Les Bassettes, the Pastor, Jean Heller, and his wife Anna, with the little schoolmistress Alice demurely knitting with swift flickerings of shining needles, the men fell to talking of the state of anarchy in which the country had been left.

Jean severely blamed the Federal Government for having withdrawn the troops which had been raised at the time of the surrender of Clinchant, with the remainder of Bourbaki's unfortunate army of the East.

"They ought not to have left us without protection. There is not a soldier nearer than Berne, or a policeman than Lochle or Chaux-Fonds!"

To this the Pastor agreed, but represented that it was not easy for a country like Switzerland to keep an army in the field merely to do police duty.

"A state ought to protect its citizens—that at least," said Jean, with his grim campaigning face upon him. "However," he continued, "I am less to be pitied than many others. I can protect myself, and it will go ill with any rascals who come across the water to steal my cattle."

The women sat silent, a little awed by the seriousness of the men's conversation. Suddenly Madame Anna asked the Pastor if he had seen any plunderers that day.

"Only one," he said. "Poor fellow, he was dangling from the branch of a tree!"

"Good!" said Jean, who, in his quality of disciplined soldier, had no pity for unlicensed marauders. "Where did you find him?"

The Men of the Mountain

"At Côtes above Morteau," said the Pastor; "they are forming defensive societies there now. The patrols are riding, and all over the roads I heard the beating of their horses' feet. One of their captains, a country gentleman of Le Lac, thrust his head in at the door of a cottage where a few of our poor folk had met for worship, and took down the names of all present. He asked the women where their husbands were, what their sons were doing, and after comparing their answers with what I was able to tell him outside, he called on his men and rode on his way."

Jean Heller, once *maréchal-of-the-logis*, nodded his head with complete approval. He knew what such police work meant in a country disturbed by war.

"Yes," he said, "they are dividing the sheep from the goats. They must know who are honestly occupied, and who living by rapine! Then their task will be easy."

"May God make them merciful to any poor souls who have been led astray!" said the little schoolmistress compassionately.

The Pastor turned to her quickly and held out his hand.

"Well said, little one," he cried, the light of the love he bore for all the weak and sinful of the earth glorifying his countenance with a certain far-off suggestion of the radiance of his Master's upon the mount. "I also pray that these mistaken ones may return to the fold. But how shall one convert a sinner if he be hanged?"

Jean shook his head. He knew that the men who attacked houses, terrified weak women, plundered

farms and byres, set fire to the good corn gathered into barn, only to wreak their idle vengeance and love of mischief, were not to be converted by patience and long-suffering—hardly even by the grace of God. He was heart and soul with the men who in town and country were banding themselves to restore order. However, he did not say that to David Alix. As a lord of flocks and herds, Jean Heller knew that it was a vain and dangerous thing to let the trapped wolf off with an admonition in a land of sheepfolds.

"There is, however, one piece of good news," the Pastor continued; "the band which lay in the wood opposite to my mother's house is broken up. The man who calls himself Ludovic Villars has disappeared. The Morteau men raided it last night, and I fear that that man I saw was one of the poor wretches whom they captured."

"It may be somewhat fortunate for your mother and sister, however," said Jean. "They were a dangerous lot—that Villars gang! I knew Breslin the smith, and if the rope be about his neck, the justice of man has fallen upon no innocent victim."

Meanwhile the night had closed in. Madame Anna busied herself with her household affairs, the washing of dishes and the like, with little clinkings of glass and subdued clattering of china. In this pleasant familiar bustle the little schoolmistress bore her part. The men continued to talk and the women to listen, as was indeed proper when such serious things were being discussed. Jean took it upon himself to advise the Pastor to go armed while these dangerous days lasted. His life was too precious, he said. They

could not do without him, and for the sake of the whole neighbourhood it was his duty to preserve so precious a life.

"If the Lord have need of me, He will preserve me," said David; "moreover, to speak even according to your own prudence, Jean Heller, I am safer as it is. Did He not save my life once already when the breach-blocks of the German rifles were clicked down and the muzzles pointed? And where would I have been now, if Von Hartmann had found a loaded pistol in my coat pocket? As it was, I was nearly shot for carrying a dozen rolls of bread!"

This was so just that Jean could not answer it.

"At any rate, keep to the daylight," he persisted; "at night the outlaws might not even know who you were. And to-night you will permit me to take my rifle and escort you home."

"Not so, good Jean," said the Pastor; "see, I have my guard all ready!"

Then rising, he clapped his hands three times at the open door, and from the wood, now drowned in the deepest shadow, came back three times the hoot of an owl.

All who were there, except the man thus provided with the unseen escort, felt a thrill of superstitious terror run chill down their backs. Only David was calm and smiling.

"I do not know who or what it may be that thus protects me; but this I know, it is sent of the Lord and must work His will. Madame Heller, shall we prepare to worship God?"

The goodwife of the house of Les Bassettes

laid aside her domestic duties, washed and wiped her hands, with the care of one who is about to take part in holy things. She then went to a little cupboard in the wall, shut with an ancient square door of carven oak. Opening it, she took out an old Genevan Bible in the French language, bound in calf-skin, with the black coarse outside hair worn shiny and thin. This she placed before the Pastor. Jean sat straight in his chair, his military stiffness softened by a sudden tenderness. His wife placed herself by his side, her hands folded in a white napkin on her knee, as was her wont when hearing her pastor preach in church. For the first time the little schoolmistress lifted her eyes to those of David Alix. The lamp which Anna Heller had lighted shone with brightness on his pale, clear-cut features, which had once been ruddy as those of the other young David. His hair fell upon his brow, and he tossed it back with a little motion that was habitual to him.

There was now no danger that Alice should encounter the Pastor's gaze—that mild, gentle, brooding gaze, still as a Sabbath morn, which dwelt on the face of his neighbour, as if it could see through the veil of flesh deep into the soul. Instinctively of late years Alice Brante had avoided those eyes of David Alix. She told herself that she was not worthy. She seemed to herself light and frivolous in the face of so much self-devotion. The memory of certain innocent passages with this young fellow and that other—she would have called them "flirtations" if the word had at that date penetrated to the Jura—how a certain Alexandre Parny of Lausanne had carried

her little black trunk from the station to her boarding-house all the way on his shoulder ; how Franz Baumann of Zurich had brought her a packet of "edelweiss" after an excursion in the great Alps, and had begged for one of his own blossoms back again as a souvenir —how she had given it to him. And then, worst of all, there was the young English tourist who had lost his way, and to whom she had served tea in her arbour outside instead of bringing him in to Madame Anna. No, of a surety, she was not worthy, few, simple, and childishly innocent as her souvenirs were.

Yet as she looked at David turning over with love and reverent familiarity the pages of the old family Bible which had survived so many storms of persecution and the threatened fires of so many edicts, her heart warmed. Assuredly it was good to watch such a man.

"Let us worship God," said David Alix, and in a low thrilling voice he began to read out the psalm :

"Whoso dwelleth in the secret of the Most High
Shall abide in the shadow of the Almighty :
I will say unto the Lord, 'O mine hope and my fortress !'
He is my God—in Him will I trust.

"Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night
Nor of the arrow that flieth by day,
Nor of the pestilence that walketh in the darkness,
Nor of the plague that destroyeth at noonday.

"There shall none evil come unto thee,
Neither shall any plague come near thy tabernacle :
For He shall give His angels charge over thee,
To keep thee in all thy ways."

'IN A LOW THRILLING VOICE HE BEGAN TO READ OUT THE PSALM.'

The Evening Sacrifice

The psalm was sung to a well-known Huguenot chant as old as Clément Marot. Doubtless That which was in the wood heard the uplifted voices, and if a good spirit, it stood still to listen—perhaps even drew near to partake.

After that a chapter was read, the Fourteenth of John, dear to David Alix not only for its own sake, but because, of all the chapters of the Bible, it was that most connected with Scotland—the words coming back to him sanctified by the memory of many communion seasons, of some Christian deathbeds—because it was the page he had found oftenest open by the pillow of the bedridden, or in the hand of the afflicted and the bereaved.

And so in the midst of the great surrounding uncertainty he read the chapter now. The winds off the mountain ruffled the leaves of the ancient quarto of Geneva. He laid his hand upon the top edges to hold them down. Then for the first time Alice noted that a thin stream of blood was trickling down his sleeve. She could hardly keep herself from instantly rising up with the cry, "David, David, you are hurt!" as she would have done in the days when he was a brave and gentle young lad coming home from college and she a little trotting girl, wading knee-deep among the daisies.

But just then the words of final command came from his lips as he closed the book, and kneeling, laid his clasped hands upon the rough, untanned, calf-skin leather.

"*Let us pray!*"

And he prayed that the souls of all present might

be clean and clear, washed in the fountain of true holiness, which is Jesus Christ. He prayed for the weak and erring, for those led sadly astray, serving the devil when they ought to serve their country. He prayed for peace and the coming of that love upon the world which is the spirit of Jesus Christ. He pleaded for themselves—for strength to be strong and long-suffering and gentle. And last of all, he prayed that their sins might be forgiven, in the measure and according to the spirit in which they themselves forgave their enemies.

And to this they said "Amen" with one voice, and so, with strange exalted hearts, arose from their knees.

The sacrifice of the lips, which in this case was also the sacrifice of the heart, was ended.

CHAPTER XV.

BRESLIN THE SMITH

AS soon as David Alix and his host appeared in the doorway which looks towards the mountain, a dark figure fled silently back into the covert of the forests that descend almost to the walls of Les Bassettes. Coming out of the lighted room the two men could see nothing. Even had they been close by, it is to be doubted if they could have made out more than they had seen from the doorstep.

But it chanced that the little schoolmistress, terrified by the wound of which David had made so little, had darted along the passage behind the fodder-mows which Jean had constructed for her, back to her own chamber. She was in time to catch such a glimpse of the figure that scudded noiselessly to cover as was possible under the uncertain light of a moonless and cloud-veiled sky. Those fine eyes, with their elastic pupils, had not been given her in vain. Somehow at night it always appeared to her much lighter than to other people. She saw all obstacles in the path, even on the darkest night. She went forward fearlessly, perhaps not so much actually seeing as divining the path. To-night she saw clearly the dark figure standing at the wall of the little

orchard, the head leaning forward, and what looked like a ragged cloak gathered about the head and shoulders. The face could not be seen, owing to the shadow of the cowl, and also because the man held a part of his cloak before his face. But Alice Brante could make out the glint of light along the rifle barrel, and what she knew to be a cartridge bag belted about his waist.

A moment more, and the vision had disappeared. He did not run or walk or use any ordinary method of locomotion. He simply disappeared as instantly and completely as if he had sunk into the ground. Then after a pause, from the depths of the wood, there came first three clear calls of the owl, and again, as if the bird had flown farther, three more, faint and more distant.

David Alix clapped his hands to signify his departure to his mysterious guide. Then he saluted his host and strode away across the rough, torrent-seamed brow of the fells in the direction of Villars Chaumont. Alice felt her heart beat strongly. She saw his figure disappear, staff in hand, the shoulders a little bent, as was his custom when walking fast. And her prayers pursued the best man in the world, as, not without reason, the Pastor of the Doubs Valley appeared to her. Then with a faint cry she held her breath. For lo! in the opaline mist which even in the darkness brooded over the lake, she saw the Shadow. It passed across the glade, with head far forward, long locks that fell on the cowl which had now been pushed back upon the shoulders in order to hear better, gun in hand, silent and deadly in pursuit as one of those Indians on the

trail in those precious volumes of Fenimore Cooper which she had read on the sly at college.

Alice, the little schoolmistress, could hardly keep herself from crying out after the Pastor to warn him that he was followed. But she remembered what he had said, how he himself had summoned the guard out of the wood, placing himself as it were under its protection. She was a reader of the Bible, this little hill girl, and her faith was strong and, happily for herself, noways critical. Yet she could not help thinking of how the Evil One, taking the appearance of a protector, may deceive the very elect.

When no more was to be seen, she threw herself down on her knees by the bedside to pray for the man who had once been to her as a brother, on whose shoulder she had sat, holding on to his long hair as he gambolled with her in the meadows of Le Lochle.

A knock came to the door, and before she had time to rise Madame Anna came in with her cheery "Child, child, what are you doing here by yourself in the darkness? Why did you go away without bidding us good-night? Jean is quite desolated—tut—tut—come back at once!"

And she raised Alice from her knees, without ceremony, yet with more gentleness than might have been expected from one who could so well handle the long-shafted ladle upon her husband's shoulders.

The little schoolmistress went obediently with Madame Anna. She knew the love which these two loving, childless ones had for her. She was in a manner their child, and as such they watched over her. So close a surveillance less tenderly exercised,

upon a nature less simple and true than that of the little schoolmistress, would have ended by growing irksome. But Alice had nothing to hide. At least, up to this moment, she had not kept back anything from Anna Heller. Yet now she guarded herself carefully from revealing what she had seen crossing the glade that led down to the white lily-fields on the edge of the Bay of Pargots. Why she did this, Alice could not have told. It seemed to her somehow David's secret, and now that it was hers also, she would keep it as between David and herself. Had he not gone to the door and clapped his hands? Had he not been answered? She remembered now the smiling confident look of triumph on his face as he turned to Jean. Yes, she would keep it secret—the thing that she had seen. David would tell her of his own free will one day, and till then, she would put her faith where he had taught her to put it, in the Most High. The psalm, too, that they had often sung together came back to her comfortingly.

> "He shall give His angels charge over thee
> To keep thee in all thy ways."

Nor did this well-instructed little daughter of Geneva fail to remember and weigh who it was, that on a certain occasion in the wilderness of tempting, had quoted this very text. But Alice had a faith in David, her dear foster-brother, so strong that she did not think he could have fallen into any snare of the devil. It was God who watched over him—why then should she be afraid?

She said a good-night to Jean and Anna with her

usual grave, sweet self-possession, but with eyes unusually great and solemn. Then they escorted her back to her official bed-chamber, Jean testing as he went the thin iron wire which connected a bell-pull at her bedhead with a bell in their own room. He had insisted on putting this up, as soon as the plague of marauders began to show itself along the Doubs, crossing into Switzerland from the mountain departments of the Middle East.

Alice lay long awake that night. She rose and slipped now and then to the window to listen. Once a dog barked loudly, away in the direction of Chaumont. Once, through the far-heard soughing of the Saute of the Doubs, she heard what seemed to be a distant shot. Then, sitting on her bedside with a shawl about her, and her feet tucked underneath for fear of spiders, she sank to sleep, and awaked to find herself chill in the night air. Humbly she crept back into bed, and there slumbered till the dawning. She awoke with a sense of shame—for it was almost time for her school to open. Hurriedly dressing herself she ran to demand from Anna a draught of the morning milk. She found that good woman busy with her bread-making, the board spread, a cup set, and all in readiness. Anna pushed her into her place, making pretence of great indignation, stamping her foot, and demanding what such a girl could expect who could sleep the good God's morning away in so disgraceful a fashion.

Alice answered, with her mouth full of bread and blonde Jura honey, that for some reason she had been long in getting to sleep the night before.

"You fell asleep at your prayers again, I wager," cried the indignant housewife; "better that you should say them in bed than that thus you should risk your death of cold! And as likely as not you had your window open. Ah, do not deny it—I heard it click."

And Alice did not deny it. For indeed, there remained little time, and her appetite was brisk and healthy as that of a child. The fears of the night had passed. The sunlight, flooding all the valley and painting the *bassins* of the deepest indigo down at the bottom of the steep slopes, dispelled her fears in spite of herself. God certainly reigned in the daytime. David had got safe home, and the heart of the little schoolmistress was glad within her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WRATH OF MAN

IT was true. David Alix had been well informed. It was a fact that Ludovic Villars had disappeared. It was true that his band had been broken up by a raid of the men of Morteau. But though the path of the chief lay elsewhere than along the banks of the Great Bassin and the Less, his scattered men still haunted the neighbourhood, and were indeed more dangerous than ever.

Before he disappeared Ludovic Villars had nominated his henchman, Breslin, the huge smith, to the vacant command. He knew that if the plans he had in his mind failed, Breslin would willingly yield up his authority. But the rank and file were in no mood to obey one whom only bodily strength and a certain brute faithfulness distinguished from the others. They scattered, therefore, and either took to brigandage on their own account, or set off to join other and better-led bands. Breslin, left alone, swore vengeance. He had not a single follower. He was in a land of famine. He slept out under the fair stars of heaven or in the dripping woods. He dare not venture to his own village, and even if he received a pardon,

most likely only the blackened walls of his house and smithy would remain.

These thoughts made him nearly mad. Sometimes he would sit under a tree with his head between his hands for hours, almost for days. He lurked and stole. Once or twice he crossed the frontier, where plunder was more plentiful. Mostly he kept well away from Villars Chaumont, which since the abortive attack had been well guarded, and also from the farm of Bassettes —where Jean Heller was known to be exceedingly handy with his rifle, and not wont to stand upon the least ceremony as to using it.

Breslin had imbibed from his late chief a deep and sullen hatred of the whole family who dwelt in Villars Chaumont. He knew in a vague way that Ludovic was the rightful heir, and also, that if those who at present enjoyed his heritage were removed, his chief would use the money which came to him for the purpose of creating a new order of things—indeed, a new world.

Breslin could not imagine what this new world could possibly be. His imagination was limited to unmeasured absinthe, full meals, and nothing to do. But he trusted his chief. Madame of Villars Chaumont, the *châtelaine*, as head of the house, certainly drew most of his anger. Had he not seen her withstand and, indeed, defeat his idol? Next on his black list came David Alix—not so much for his own sake as because he was so well beloved that his very name was a shelter and a buckler to all who dwelt under the same roof. The real obstacle to these notable schemes, Noélie Villars, the huge lurking plotter thought nothing

of at all. She might well share the fate of the others when the time arrived. At any rate, he would see to it that when Ludovic came back to claim his own, he should find an empty house, and all the tribe of his enemies dead and buried.

Then he would thank his faithful follower, and carry him along with him into the new order of things he was going to create. So Breslin set himself with all the skill and secrecy of which his nature was capable, to carry out so amiable a design. True, he was only a subordinate villain, this huge, hulking smith ; but, nevertheless, because of his fidelity, he made the best of all tools. He was without conscience, save that he would do his best for the master he obeyed. Neither fear nor religion nor generosity troubled him. He had a cautious instinct, and a sure hand and eye. For days he had watched the outgoings and incomings about the house of Château Villars. Couched on the crest of the "Chaumont," from which the house took its name, he spied upon the shepherds who led their flocks afield and the men who worked in the fields. He knew when Madame was at her cheese-presses, when Noélie and the German chaplain appeared at the window in the east wing. He could see the plaid she put round his shoulders before wheeling the great chair that had been her father's out upon the balcony.

Often he was tempted to try a shot at the group—to slay either would be to earn the gratitude of the chief, whose approbation he coveted above gold or fame. But the distance was great ; and, still greater, the risk. For he knew that there were refugees

within who, whatever their past offences against the Government of France, were wholly faithful to their benefactor, that is, to Madame David the Elder and her household.

But there was one with whom it would be easy to begin. The death of David Alix presented no difficulties. He went everywhere unarmed; he started out early and returned late; he knew and used all the breakneck short cuts and perilous bypaths. It might not be the best, but it would be at least a beginning. The huge smith was a good shot, and there were places where it would be almost impossible to miss. Breslin tried one or two of these with his carbine, and made sure that the Pastor was in the habit of passing spots daily where the narrowness of the path would compel him to keep so near to the wood that the muzzle of Breslin's gun might almost touch his back.

So it came about that, after watching David Alix safe into the house of Les Bassettes, above the Bay of Pargots, Breslin betook himself to a place which he had previously chosen and tested. It was at the bottom of a small torrent bed now quite dry, but plentifully overgrown with underbrush, and encumbered with stones and boulders. On the side of the Bassettes the path descended steeply in zigzags, narrow and precipitous. At the bottom, on the left, was a commodious and safe shelter where Breslin could hide. Even in the daytime it would be difficult to spy him out. Then as soon as David began to remount the opposite side of the ravine, his enemy would have him clear against the sky-line. There was

even a rock on which to lean his rifle while taking aim. No merest bungler could miss. And last of all, to make everything secure, there was a clear path down the ravine by which to escape to the lake shore, where the watermen had always plenty of boats ready. Breslin would leap into one of these. In a few minutes he would be across the lake, and secure from all pursuit in his own fastnesses.

As he lay there, waiting like a wild beast for his victim, not a single thought of any wrongdoing, no shame, no sorrow, no regret for the poor people of a whole countryside deprived of their best friend, touched that cold and sullen heart. Partly this was mere brutishness and stupidity, but chiefly it was merely that Breslin had met his master. He would kill the enemies of Ludovic Villars in his absence, because that would please him on his return. Breslin desired for himself only such contemptuous recognition as Ludovic might have given to a dog with whose hunting he was well pleased.

As he lay and waited, Breslin thought of few things. His mind was not at all upon his victim. That was arranged and done for. He knew that for an hour or more David Alix would prolong his visit to the Hellers of Les Bassettes. He was, he knew, in the habit of taking supper there once a week. So, having time to spare, he cast about in his mind for occupation. He dared not smoke, but he crumbled some tobacco into his mouth, and thus managed to while away the time.

Down the deep nick of the gorge he could catch a glimpse of the lake. It shone with a curious self-

luminosity, and the semicircle of opal light, cut by the dark line of the opposite shore, was like a great, heavily-lidded eye watching a murderer.

But Breslin did not think of a God, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, to whom belong vengeance and repayment. He only thought how wonderfully like the colour of absinthe the water down there was, and ruminated whether old Louis, in the *cabaret* on the French side, would open his door and give him some when he had finished his night's work.

Breslin did not weary in his lair. He had no nerves. He had never heard that such things existed. He had no fear, for he had no imagination. He had come out to kill, and he was going to kill—not by any means for the first time. And he lay so quietly that he almost dozed at times. Yet, like a trained watch dog, he kept his ear set for the first sound of David's approaching footsteps, and the sharp rasp of his steel-shod staff upon the rocks of the irregular pathway.

He heard with internal scorn the sounds of singing in the house where he knew his victim to be.

"Aye, sing," he muttered, "it is your last psalm! Call on God—what can your Protestant God do for you now?"

It was, had he known it, a dangerous challenge. But Breslin had heard Ludovic talk, and he had been able to grasp the idea that there was now no God to punish—no fear in all that pastors and priests preached—only old wives' fables, which not even those who uttered them believed in. No thunderbolt would leap any more from the cloud, no fiery dart would cut off the evil-doer, no angel descend to interfere

with Breslin's carbine, or with unseen hand turn away the bullet from the heart of God's servant.

Ludovic Villars had said so. He knew everything; he was a Monsieur—a learned man—more learned than this Genevan mouther of prayers, who had all the old wives after the tails of his coats. "Curse the black crows!" thought Breslin. He had always hated them, from the time they had made him learn the catechism at his first communion, and when he would not, took him to his father. Breslin moved uneasily as he remembered how his father in the smithy had belted him till he should make up his mind to acquire Christian knowledge.

But hark! there were voices over yonder by the Bassettes. What if that long, lean, dangerous Jean Heller should take it into his head to accompany his pastor? It was not likely, for David Alix was accustomed to go home without escort at all hours. But still the voices towards Les Bassettes seemed strangely clear. An owl hooted, and under his breath Breslin cursed the bird. It was to him a token of ill-luck in his enterprise. But suddenly it crossed his mind that the owl was much nearer to Les Bassettes than to his hiding-place. The death warning must therefore be, as was just, for David Alix.

Again the owl hooted three times. Ah, there he was! He could see David high above him, coming towards the verge of the ravine. He paused while still on the highest point, and leaning on his staff, looked about him. The veil of mist had passed away with a brisk and chillish wind from the north, and now the sky was a rich indigo black, sown rich with stars.

"Aye, look—look," muttered the hidden Breslin, looking up also—"look well! You will see it no more—no more!"

And he chuckled as he lay and watched, his cheek against the stock of his carbine, intent upon his prey.

David stood long on the summit. He could see up and down the lake. It was dark, certainly, but clear. Here and there were points of sparkles of light. He knew what each of these signified, and his mind was already busy with his next day's work. He would carry bread to Madame Jules. To poor Drujon, the lame postman, who had had the bullet extracted out of his heel to-day, he would take bandages, ointment, and cordials. Then there would be a little meeting at the hamlet of Sons, above Le Lac, and to finish the day he would make at the south end a house-to-house census of those who were in any want—Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. He reproached himself with being rather out of touch with that district. He had not been there for at least a week.

Then, having made up his mind, he swung his staff and commenced to descend. He whistled as he went, for in such circumstances all his boyishness returned—up there on the hills where no man was. And in any case, when they have been doing His work, God makes his folk joyous.

He came to the foot of the ravine. It seemed to him that he heard a noise near at hand—as it were a feeling of human neighbourhood. A stone which assuredly he had not started went leaping down the mountain, sounding and clattering.

"A goat scared out of the path," thought David, "doubtless lying down when it heard me come." Whereupon he began to think about home—of Noélie, of Hermann Falk, of his mother. He set his foot upon the ascent.

Behind him Breslin had his gun pointed. Now he was glancing along the barrel, and waiting only till the brilliant pin above the muzzle was in exact line with the middle of David's back as he climbed clear against the sky.

Breslin's heart exulted. He rejoiced beforehand in the fall of his enemy. There! He had him. His cheek nestled a little closer in to the stock, his finger crooked on the trigger. With a little shiver his great body settled itself into absolute immobility.

The time had come.

But behind him, out of the ravine down which he had meant to escape, a tall figure had risen, suddenly insurgent above him. The stone which David heard had not yet finished clattering. Instinctively uneasy, Breslin turned his head for just the fraction of a second. He saw something dark shadowing above him like a huge bird; his eye caught the glint of a descending knife. One sudden, sharply stifled cry, and his gun escaping from his hand, slid down the gorge and exploded at the first striking of the rocks. With astonishing quickness the body of Breslin was tumbled after it, and when David, who turned instantly upon hearing the cry and the shot, reached the spot, he found nothing. All about him was silence and the sough of mountain winds.

Only from high above came softly down the cry

of his mysterious protector. The owl hooted three times and then all was silent.

Breslin was wrong to deny God the power to protect His own. He has other arms than the thunderbolt—stranger and more terrible—even the wrath of man which He teaches to praise Him.

CHAPTER XVII.

CROSS-EXAMINATION

DAVID arrived safely at Villars Chaumont, without having the least idea of the peril he had escaped, or of the delivery which the unseen hand of the Guardian had wrought for him. Doubtless it was some skirmish among the lawless bands which were continually passing to and fro across the frontier. Decent lads some of them had been in time past. That they might be so again, David hoped and in his mind believed.

As he had continued his way tranquilly over the fells, his mind turned upon his future work. He would take hold of the youth in the hour of their anguish. They should be taught to serve another Master, even his own. He knew that women are most easily moved and drawn in the hour of bereavement. He judged that, by analogy, men would have their hearts most open during the first mourning for their country laid desolate. As he approached Villars Chaumont, he sketched out an entire campaign. Ah, if only Hermann Falk could stand side by side with him in the work. But he recognised that on every ground this was impossible. He well knew that for

many years his parishioners of the border lands would hate the very name of a Prussian.

As he arrived within the enclosure of the orchard, by which ordinarily he let himself in, he saw a light in the Chaplain's room ; on making his way up thither he found Hermann Falk in bed, while his mother—with whom, curiously enough, the Pomeranian had gradually become almost a favourite—was seated in her husband's great chair, laughing at his attempts to speak French. She herself had learned German when David's father had been stationed in the north of Canton Berne.

Though her tongue had grown rusty by disuse, she understood the language and had even begun to use it again, especially since some of the exiles from Alsace began to find their way into Switzerland. But it amused her, after her day's work, to take account of the Chaplain's progress, under Noćlie's guidance, in the French language. Indeed, Madame David the Elder seemed to have laid aside her hatred of his race in favour of the man. He was David's friend. His sense and conduct were admirable, and when she managed to understand them, she approved his ideas as just, reasonable, and practical. She was proud of her son. She loved the wide repute for courage and faithfulness he had won so young ; but in her heart she approved the man of the world, the Chaplain of Imperial Majesty, the preacher of law and order, as against him whose watchwords were only mercy, forgiveness, redemption. She counted her son the more lovable, but pitied him as the weaker man.

Nevertheless, the heart of a mother beat within

her breast. She welcomed her son with affectionate scolding, as was her wont on such occasions.

Where had he been? What did he mean by being so late? Did he not know that all the roads were unsafe? Who knew but that rascal who had threatened her in her own house might waylay him?

To this volley of questioning David, after embracing his mother and reaching a hand to Hermann Falk, answered that he had only come across the hill from Les Bassettes, where he had taken supper and held a short family "cult."

At the name of Les Bassettes, a frown descended portentous upon the still handsome features of Madame. That little minx of a schoolmistress dwelt all too near, and she was a mother who had done much for her son, and was therefore desirous to keep him long to herself. In her heart Madame David the Elder was jealous of all women, because of that tall pale son who, as it seemed to her, gained all too easily their goodwill. All that she had to comfort her was that, up to the present, David had seemed singularly unimpressionable in the matter of the love of woman.

For this, indeed, his mother rather despised him, even though gladly enough profiting by his insensibility. But she said to herself, drawing upon her stock of shrewd experience, that it is just such men who, when they do fall in love, are the most apt to take the bit between their teeth. She did her best therefore to shelter David from all designing or merely attractive persons of her sex.

But Madame David was a woman of strict integrity,

and she recalled with pride that everything had been done for the girl. She had been educated, clothed, cared for, and finally through her influence she had been provided with as good a position as she could expect, in which it would be her own fault if she did not honourably gain her living.

Let her then become aware of her own position. Let her consider what she owed to the house of Villars Chaumont, and remain strictly in her own position. Above all, let her cease to open her eyes wide at sight of Pastor David Alix.

Such were the meditations, not altogether unprecedented in maternal annals, of Madame the Elder as to her son's evening "cult" at the farm of Les Bassettes.

But Madame David was a woman far too well advised to give utterance to her thoughts in any crude form. She flattered herself that she knew how to touch the culprit's conscience more easily than his affections. By doing so she might keep him farther from the fire and in the straight path of his duty.

"You have held more than one 'cult' to-day?" she inquired, looking up from her mending.

"Only one other," said David innocently, "at the foot of the lake near Le Saute. Nearly a dozen poor things were gathered together there to pray for their husbands and sons."

Madame did not reply immediately nor pursue the subject. She continued her mending, at which she was a wondrous adept. She repaired with her own hands all the articles of clothing used in the household, together with those belonging to her guests, and

her workbag was kept like a surgeon's box of instruments.

"God made the world," she said, "and at first it was very good. But even He has been mending and patching at it ever since. Mending is holy work, and shall not one poor old woman do the like in a house full of helpless, handless men!"

But now she sat silent a little while David and Hermann conversed together in English. Then during a pause, she added, as if casually, her suggestion.

"Since the country is so unsettled, would it not be better to take a few necessities, and for the present make your headquarters at Morteau or Lochle? There you would be more in the midst of your people?"

David looked up, much surprised at the proposition.

"Why, mother," he cried, "what is the matter? I have excellent legs, as you know, and it is only a month or two since you made me leave Mouthe and come across the valley to be near you. You made me promise that I should always be over the water before sunset. And I have kept my word. To-night I halted a little to sup and take evening worship, as you know is my custom after returning that way across the lake, with the good Hellers at Les Bassettes."

Madame David the Elder bit a thread sharply.

"I thought you had been at the Saute to-day!" she said, without looking up.

Now it must be remembered that the Saute is at the farther end of the lake, where after passing the lakes, the stream of the Doubs leaps into a chasm ninety feet deep. Consequently the place lies at the opposite end from the Bay of Pargots and the farm of

Bassettes on the hill above it. David's route had much resembled that of a person visiting Greenwich, who crossed by Chelsea Bridge in order to reach Trafalgar Square.

But David was far too conscience-free in the matter to be entrapped. He escaped by a simple statement of the truth.

"Poor old Père Boissard was buried to-day at Chaillaxon," he said. "They drove me there from Le Saute in a farm waggon. He had never got over the burning of his little restaurant on the hill!"

This wanton mischief had been the work of the dissolved band of Ludovic Villars, angry at finding nothing to eat or drink. For before the time of the Germans the old man had carefully carried away all the contents of his cellar, hiding casks and bottles among the rocks and brushwood. The gang had taken revenge for their disappointment by destroying his house and pretty gardens, where, at the "Bellevue du Lac," the people of the lakeside villages had been wont to come up and recreate themselves in the long summer evenings.

Madame David the Elder did not pursue the subject farther at the time. She put away her implements, wrapped up the shirt on which she had been at work, and with a short good-night, took her leave.

The Military Chaplain, who meanwhile had been lying watching the scene with inward amusement, listened till he heard the key turn in the door which shut off the east wing from the rest of the château.

"Well, David," he said, "who is the pretty girl?"

"Pretty girl," repeated David, astonished; "I quite fail to take your meaning."

"Nonsense, my David," cried his friend, "you forget that I am not so innocent as you, and that the on-looker sees for two. Also, and chiefly, I too have a mother. And I know very well when the dear old lady is poking about with her unruly evil, to find a joint in my harness. So I say, who is the pretty girl you have been seeing too often, and of whom your mother does not entirely share your good opinion?"

"I do not know," said David frankly. "I did not notice that mother was at all different. I told her the whole truth. I was at the Saute, from which I rode back with Felix Fabre in his cart to the funeral at Chaillaxon. Then I crossed the lake before sun-down, as I had promised, and so home."

"Nothing happened on the way?" queried Hermann.

"Only the guardian angel, as usual," said David, cheerfully smiling at the remembrance; "he is taming. He hoots now whenever I clap my hands."

"I should beware of that guardian angel," said Hermann thoughtfully. "I'll warrant he has a pistol concealed about his tail feathers, or a long dagger handy under his wing!"

"To tell the truth," said the Pastor lightly, "I do think I heard him take a shot at a goat which I scared out of the Logemont ravine on my way from the Hellers'. I went back, but could make out nothing. I fancy he missed his shot. Poor guardian angel, I must carry him a basketful and leave it on the rock to-morrow morning. I should not forgive

myself if his care of my safety caused him to go without a meal."

"You are strangely tender," said Hermann. "Now if I had heard a gun go off in an uncertain country, I should have listened if the bullet did not chance to whistle near my own ears. And as for going back, I should have taken my heels as high as my neck and scudded for it."

So that night the name of Alice, the little schoolmistress of Les Bassettes, was not once named among the people at Villars Chaumont.

Early next morning David took some food in a basket to the Gorge of Logemont. He was rather astonished to find that a considerable part of the upper bank of the ravine had caved in during the night, filling the bottom for a hundred yards below the point at which he had crossed with boulders, shale, and fresh red earth.

But at this season such small landslides were by no means uncommon in these narrow ravines, undercut and worn friable by the winter rains. David, therefore, thought no more about the matter. He only lifted up his heart in a moment's thanksgiving that by divine mercy the avalanche had not fallen when he was passing.

His prayer ended, he left the basket with the food under the shadow of a bush of juniper and went his way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

DAVID ALIX did not set out for the head of the lake in so cheerful a frame of mind as usual. That morning he had tried to see Noélie, but was told by his mother that she was suffering from headache and keeping her bed. He must not disturb his sister, she said. Perhaps Noélie might be better when she woke.

Madame spoke with more than her usual morning dryness, and David set off on his rounds with the well-known feeling that his mother was in "one of her turns." On such occasions it was well understood by Noélie and himself, that as far as possible they should efface themselves. So with this in his mind he prepared to make a longish day of it, outside the domains of his lady mother.

But he thought with pity of his poor Noélie, shut up with her headache, and of Hermann Falk chained to his armchair in the window, solacing himself as best as he could with his pipe and a book.

David had the whole wide country spread out before him like a map, the winding Doubs, the glittering lake-basins, and the rugged hills of the Franche

Comté rising on the opposite side. Yonder on the knoll was Le Lac, whither he was going, and far away to the south a little mist of smoke floated up into the still air. That was Morteau.

He had now to begin the day with a duty disagreeable in itself, and doubly so because it represented one of his failures. He was anxious, therefore, to have it over and done with. He must go and see the man of the Pierre à Feu, called Black Leo. Leo Corcelle had lost his surname. To himself and all the countryside he was only Black Leo the Outlaw. He dwelt in a hut rudely constructed by his own hands under a steep wall of cliff to the west of Pierre à Feu. With him was a boy of eight or nine years, wild and active as a chamois, who, at the first alarm, escaped and hid among the rocks till such time as the intruder might be gone. Few had spoken with this child. It was rumoured that he only sang or gabbled a sort of wild gibberish.

Many attempts had been made to reclaim him. David especially had been unwearied, for the shame was that both Black Leo and his son came of good Protestant people out of the Northern Vosges. Black Leo's father had at one time been precentor and clerk in his own father's little temple at Le Lochle. He it was who raised the chanted psalm to the grave, sweet melodies of the ancient Reformed Church of Geneva. As senior elder Paul Corcelle had served the bread and wine of consecration to the congregation; David could just remember him as a tall, white-headed man, growing bent with years and sorrow.

His son Leo had broken his father's heart. There

must have been wild blood somewhere, for from his birth the boy had been fierce and unmanageable as a young jungle tiger. He had run away from school, refused instruction, scoffed at punishment, and at an age when most country boys were still keeping sheep on the mountain sides, he had served in the prisons of two countries a long apprenticeship to vice.

Black Leo was, of course, an unrivalled poacher, breaking every regulation as to time and season, an accomplished thief, and generally a terror to them that do well. He lived mostly in France and called himself a Frenchman, but he had spent as much time in one country as the other—everywhere an Ishmaelite wanderer, his hand against every man and every man's hand against his.

Of late years, however, he had seemed to grow more rooted to one spot, confining himself by preference to the bunch of wild hills behind Ceay. This, indeed, constituted a refuge well suited to his needs. On one side he could escape from his little peninsula of mountain and gorge by simply crossing the Doubs. All Switzerland, on the other hand, lay immediately behind him. He could be over the frontier line in half an hour, by paths which no man knew but himself.

But Black Leo's settling down at Pierre à Feu did not make him in the least more civilised. Indeed, he grew fiercer and was more sullenly dangerous to approach than ever. It was no wonder that his nearest neighbours shunned the semicircular valley where the wild beast had his lair. Even in the time of war the boldest roving bands gave it a wide berth, and a

German detachment on mission of punition had been forced to retire without taking the outlaw of Pierre à Feu, and that with the loss of three men shot clean through the head. The affair added vastly to Black Leo's fame as a marksman, and for a time he was thought to have deserved well of his country. But when Japy's band, the self-styled "Vengers of Treason," crossed the mountain of Ceay with the idea of quartering themselves upon Jean Heller at Bassettes, they were peremptorily summoned to fall back by a long-haired outlaw who thrust his head and a rifle-barrel at them over a wall of rock.

"Go back," cried Black Leo, "this is my country!"

They called him traitor. They reasoned with him; they offered him the lieutenancy of their band, next to Japy himself. But he answered only, "Go away, or I will certainly shoot the foremost of you through the head."

Captain Japy himself, attired in Lincoln green laced with gold, like a stage Cartouche or Robin Hood, was game to try a rush and a volley. But his men knew better.

"He would kill a dozen of us, as likely as not," they argued. "He has plenty of spare guns, and that wolf cub of his knows how to load them!"

After this the reputation of Black Leo as a patriot was somewhat obscured. But his attitude of savage menace and his marksmanship saved him from disturbance. Gendarmes there were none in the neighbourhood. They were still helping that great little man at Versailles, Monsieur Thiers, to root the Commune out of Paris.

But the people of the farms and outlying villages about Mont Ceay were grateful exceedingly to Black Leo, for the fear his name had laid upon the marauders who robbed them right and left, on the plea that the fatherland was in danger. They did not indeed venture to set foot on Leo's mountain themselves, but they left a word of information and some provisions at well-understood points. If they went to Le Lac they took a long détour, skirting his territories. But they were grateful all the same for the dour savagery with which the outlaw kept his mountain inviolate as a barrier between their flocks and herds, their wives and daughters, and that scum of the Eastern departments which had been changed from robbers to patriots by the simple process of sticking a feather in its cap.

But David Alix stood on another footing with the man of Pierre à Feu. By one of the strange contradictions not uncommon, Black Leo's denominational feeling had survived intact through all the crimes, prisons, battles, debauches, quarrels, and the savage solitude of thirty years. He was a Protestant. David was his pastor. He listened humbly therefore to his admonitions, agreed with his teachings, accepted his ever-hopeful benediction, and straightway went and cheerfully committed all the old sins over again.

This morning David found the outlaw at the door of his hut. It was clapped like a lean-to against an overhang of the rock, and the soft Jura stone had been cut away to form a comfortable enough inner apartment, which, however, could only be lighted from

the door of the hovel without. But a spy-hole in the excavated chamber, to which the boy could spring by a flight of notches in the rock, laid open the whole district by which attack was possible.

And perhaps it was owing to this fact that David Alix always found his unprofitable co-religionary most innocently occupied. He rose at the Pastor's approach, and with a welcoming gesture pointed to the stone seat on which he had been sitting. After his customary benediction, said with uplifted hand, David sat down, and the outlaw, with a long look round, which took in every mountain path and clump of birch or willow that might shelter an approaching enemy, placed himself gravely on the other side of the door. He looked at the ground and kept silence.

"Where is my friend, young Paul?" asked David.

The silent figure on the other side of the doorway pointed upward with a jerk of his thumb. David followed the direction with his eyes, and saw peeping out of a square opening in the wall of greyish rock the round curly head, brown cheeks, and black mischievous eyes of Paul Corcelle, more commonly called "The Wild Cat of Pierre à Feu."

If his father was reticent, not so the son. At sight of the Pastor looking at him he laughed, a wild shrill scream of mirth, like that of the curlew, but with notes in it reminding the hearer of flocks bleating on distant pastures. Then suddenly dropping into familiar speech (for the Wild Cat could talk well enough when he chose), he nodded his head and said confidentially, "I saw you!"

"Well," said David, "what did I do?"

"Stopped on Pargotto Hill to look at little schoolmistress!" he said, and again a wild flourish of curlew mirth rang out.

David flushed a little. Now that he came to think of it, he *had* noticed Alice Brante playing with her little flock a few minutes before lessons began. She wore a white dress, and was running hatless in the sun. He could faintly hear the shrill cries of the children as they got out of her way.

"Watched for Ma'm'selle, you did!" repeated the boy, pointing an accusing finger down at the Pastor.

David evaded discussion.

"Why not come down beside me," he said, "and we can discuss the matter!"

"Talk as well here—watch better!" the boy answered sententiously. David laughed and turned to Black Leo.

"What news on the mountain?" he asked. The outlaw raised eyes sombrely sullen, to meet the clear blue ones of his pastor. The question was direct and could not be avoided.

"I hold it," the man answered; "let those come to seek me who dare!"

"I have prayed for you," said David, "every night and morning since last I saw you, that the Lord would soften your heart."

"I thank you, Pastor!" said the outlaw, bowing his head gravely. "You were ever a man of your duty—as was your father before you!"

No spark of anger or sign of emotion passed over the rugged, weather-beaten countenance of the man

of Pierre à Feu. In some way he claimed a far-off allegiance to the true Reformed faith, through the Pastor whom, though he delighted to honour, he stopped a long way short of obeying.

"I prayed," said David Alix gently, "for a man who brought his father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave!"

"You did well, Pastor David!"

"I prayed for a man who, when his mother was dying, aged and worn out, dared not come down to kiss her cheek and take her blessing."

"They were waiting at the door to take that man, my Pastor!" said the outlaw, with the quiet simplicity of one who has his conscience clear.

"Also he was a man-slayer—that man for whom I prayed!" the Pastor continued.

"He was angered, and justly angered, that man-slayer for whom you prayed," answered Black Leo. "But yet I say not that his sin was the less!"

The Pastor continued without pausing, letting fall his words kindly and sadly, as if he spoke of another than this man.

"He left his mother to be comforted by another's voice, to receive the kiss of peace from another's lips, and to die in the arms of a stranger!"

"Not so—in yours, Pastor David!" said the outlaw, with his eyes still on the ground. But there was now for the first time a keen and real accent of humanity in his voice. David judged that he had done enough for the time.

"Now I will pray with that man," he said; "let us kneel down!"

'I PRAYED FOR A MAN WHO BROUGHT HIS FATHER'S GREY HAIRS IN SORROW TO THE GRAVE.'

And without stopping a moment to see if the outlaw obeyed him, he knelt with his face to the wall and prayed. Black Leo knelt also, simple and obedient as a child, and from above the impish face of the Wild Cat looked down, perhaps a little awed.

After the prayer David Alix rose up to take his adieu. He held out his hand, and the outlaw grasped it with a stern pressure. But it was more lack of habit than any emotion. For it is very certain that since David had visited him last, no other hand had taken his in friendship.

"Paul," said the Pastor, "come with me and show me the way to the Ceay bridge."

The boy's scream of mocking laughter rang out higher than ever.

"It is not likely," he cried, "when you know it as well as I."

"Nevertheless, come with me—I have something to say to you," persisted David.

"Do I not know?" sneered the imp, putting out his tongue. "You want to make me learn your catechism. Pah, I can say it by heart."

Whereupon he chattered over the answers to one or two of the first questions in the Genevan catechism. At this rebellion, his father turned sharply, and a light, dully red and menacing, shone like dying charcoal in his eye. One caught it a moment, and then it was extinct.

"Begone with the Pastor, sirrah, and see that you learn well your religion!" he commanded, not loudly, but in a voice like the first mutterings of a thunderstorm.

And in an instant the boy was by the Pastor's side, leading him down the path to the bridge of Ceay, which passes by Petits Fourgs. David looked back. Black Leo was still standing motionless, his rifle held ready in his right hand, the polished steel about the butt winking in the sun.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PASTOR'S DAY

THE situation began to clear a little in the eastern departments. Little by little the Government of France extended its authority. Prefects had been sent down after the 4th of September by the Government of Gambetta, but these hasty stop-gaps had been generally recalled or superseded by the Bordeaux Assembly, which began to show itself more and more reactionary.

But these newcomers, at least in the east, had little power, even in departments free of the Germans. Soldiers, Mobiles, gendarmes, all the ordinary methods of enforcing authority were wanting. The needs of the Versailles Government drew them to the walls of Paris to crush the insurrection there. In most cases, only a few officers of inferior tribunals, rural policemen, and forest rangers were left.

The more energetic of the prefects encouraged the inhabitants of the cities and towns to enrol themselves for police duty. But they were powerless to do anything for the remote frontiers.

On the Swiss side little help was given to the citizens. A few police from Neuchâtel were sent up,

but once snugly quartered upon the citizens of the Federal Republic, they gave themselves (or anybody else) little farther trouble. Had these been state officers in command of even a small force, the country would have been rapidly cleared. But the colonels of the Swiss service were busily at work guarding what remained of Bourbaki's army, and arranging for the return of the men who had been distributed among the different cantons to their own homes.

It chanced that on the day of David's visit to the strongholds of the man of Pierre-à-Feu, the reigning Sous-Prefect was to visit Morteau. David, therefore, resolved to take the chance of making a representation to lawful authority as to the true state of affairs on the frontier.

The Sous-Prefect was a little dark man, very fussy and eager. He had been all round the little town discovering for himself in how short time the forces of law and order could be brought together. He promised to send them a bugler from Besançon. They could never, he said, be able to save their country unless they accustomed themselves to military discipline in all its rigour.

But the Captain of the "Guard of Order" of Morteau was a baker. He represented that not only were there times when, if he left his post, the whole neighbourhood would go without bread next day, but that for himself he had never been able to distinguish one note of music from another all his life.

This check threw the Sous-Prefect back upon the general truth that what was needed was a spirit of union and self-sacrifice. He would send them the

bugler, however, and for the sake of the baker he would add a tambour able to beat a "general" such as could not be misunderstood even by a conscientious tradesman engaged in the sacred duty of setting his oven.

The Sous-Prefect received David Alix with the mistrust which the sight of a Protestant pastor in the dress of his calling rarely fails to excite in the breasts of French officials of the second order. The gracious smile and benignant air with which he bowed over the hands of all who were presented to him altered strangely when he saw David's white tie and long-skirted black coat. He hesitated and looked about him for some one to take the monster off his hands.

But after the first words the magic of David's speech fascinated him. Every Frenchman loves to hear his language well spoken, and David was a "*beau parleur*."

He told of the wandering bands of plunderers, the constant crossings from one country into the other, the slackness of the Swiss and cantonal authorities, the solitary wanderings, the wreckage of broken bands, and, above all, the influx of camp-followers and plunderers attracted by the battlefields of the north and centre.

The Sous-Prefect heard him to the end, but shook his head when David spoke of remedies.

"We must first assure ourselves of the great towns," he said, "then in turn of the sous-prefectures, the smaller towns, and larger villages. It is manifestly the duty of the Swiss Government to protect its own

frontiers. However, I shall certainly call the attention of my own Government to that matter. Rest assured. You shall not be forgotten."

Then he turned to David, eyed him long, and said, with a recurrence of his distrust, "But how comes it, sir, that you, who are a pastor of the Reformed sect, should know more than these good priests of the Catholic Church with whom I have been conferring?"

"Because," said David, smiling, "each of these gentlemen has his own parish to look after, his daily services, his parishioners to care for. Therefore, in general, they know only what comes under their own eyes, each in his place."

"And you, Monsieur le Pasteur, have not you also your place and parish?" demanded the great man, glowering up at David as if to make out whether he were a spy—for that mania was then at its height in the east of France. (Indeed, it has never died out since the war, as artists, photographers, and scribblers of notes have learned to their cost.)

"I," said David, "have indeed a place and a parish. Only it is a wide place and a great parish. I am set to tend the scattered souls belonging to my faith from Besançon to Salon le Meunier. I serve eleven churches and chapels, together with many places of fixed meeting in private houses."

"Ah," said the Sous-Prefect, "you must obtain a great deal of information in the course of your constant journeyings. To whom has that information been conveyed?"

"I am endeavouring to convey it to yourself, Monsieur le Sous-Prefect!"

"How long have you been in this position—pastor of these many congregations, I mean?" demanded the official, now eager to take David in a snare.

"For eight years, and my father occupied the same position for thirty years before me."

The Sous-Prefect turned about. He was scarcely satisfied, or rather he did not wish to be. His eyes lighted upon the Mayor of Morteau, whom he summoned to his side in his uniform of Captain of the "Guard of Order."

"This gentleman appears to know a great deal about the state of the Swiss frontiers," he said; "it might be to your advantage to be acquainted with him."

"Know him," cried the hearty Mayor, "why, have not I known him ever since he used to eat buns in my shop when his father came here on his visitations! Know Pastor David Alix!"—he burst out into hearty laughter. "Why, I have a whole bundle of his reports in my strong box. He has sent them in nearly every week, but I have been so busy with one thing and another—billeting German troops, raising French ones, besides governing this unruly municipality, and attending to my business—that I never got time to read them! However, here they are!"

The Sous-Prefect, reassured in spite of himself, bade the Mayor to let him have anything the young Pastor might write. Then he bowed stiffly to David and took his way through the little town-house, having become in an instant bland and smiling as before.

It was not because of the fervency of his sous-prefectorial religious convictions that he showed this

mistrustful attitude towards David Alix. He had not entered a church of his own free will since his first communion at the age of twelve. But he had retained from his early education at a Catholic seminary the instinctive dislike with which even atheists in France regard Protestants of their own speech and nation. Englishmen are heretics, and there is no more about it. But it seems to them unnatural that a Frenchman should show any zeal for religion. Or if he is so foolish, it must be to take in the *calotins*, as he calls the priesthood of the Church of Rome There may be some political reason for such zeal. Votes are to be gained. But Protestantism—well, he will admit, upon example given, that there are Protestants in Parliament—some even have been ministers of the Republic. But as an influence in the Government of France the official neither recognises nor knows it.

All this David understood very well, and it was with unfeigned relief that he escaped out of the stifling atmosphere of false compliment and barefaced flattery, to find himself in the winding main street of the town.

In 1871 Morteau was only a little whitewashed village lying snugly in its dell. Watchmaking had not yet found a way over from Switzerland, but the breath of the coming enrichment already blew, and the inhabitants were certain that, the war once passed away, their village would share in the prosperity of their neighbours across the frontier.

But from the "leading citizens," with their visions of coming wealth, David Alix quickly withdrew himself. He passed down an alley, climbed a flight of stairs to a terrace of mean, little, two-chambered

houses, called locally the "Swallows' Nests." He entered the first of these without knocking, sure of what he would find.

A sweet-faced old woman sat knitting and, as it seemed, looking out of the window. At the sound of his footstep on the stairs and the creak of the handle, she turned quickly. The knitting dropped on the floor. She bowed her head to receive the unfailing "blessing of the household."

"Pastor Alix!" she said, "whom I once called 'Baby David'—it is hard that I should never see you. Let me touch you—a blind woman's hands are her eyes. You have your father's word, his voice, his grace. Him I have seen, but I shall never see you, his son. For God took my sight before you were born."

"Vain is the strength of man," said David softly, "and our God, who has supported you for these forty years, will not forsake you now in the time of hoar hairs."

"I know, I know," said the old woman, laying her hand on a book on a shelf at her side, "it is written here. Your father gave me this when last he set foot in my poor house—the Word—the Word! It is his gift, and with it I am richer than the kings of the earth!"

Beneath the window passed the fanfare, the bugles of the Sous-Prefect's escort, blowing him sturdily to the town boundary on his way back to make his report at Besançon.

"What is it, Pastor?" said the old woman, with faint anxiety; "not more war, surely?"

"No, Eliza," David answered gently, "only a man in authority going back to Besançon."

"Ah," she sighed, "I am glad it is not the Germans. Though surely I have little reason to complain. Three of them came one day, and wrote down my name in a book. One of them asked what I did for a living. I told him that I was a poor blind woman waiting upon the Lord's time to take me to Himself. Another took up my New Testament and bade me read. I read to him, though my fingers little loved the task. But, except he who had spoken first, I think none of them understood. Then the man who had spoken a little French took the book of the Word out of my hands, and asked how I had come by it. I told him my pastor had given it me.

"'Then,' he said, 'the Pastor can give you another. I dare say he gets them cheap enough. There is nothing else worth taking in this garret.' So they went away ill enough pleased, but carrying my book with them.

"And by that I knew that they were no right soldiers. Because even Prussians would not steal a poor blind woman's only companion. And I was right, for even as I was crying bitterly to myself, because I could no longer read of Jesus when I was all day alone, or when sleepless in the night-watches, I heard again steps on the stairs, rough words, and the lashes of a whip laid on heavily and with purpose.

"The door was flung open, and the voice of the man whom I had heard on the stairs spoke harshly, but not to me. Then the thief who had taken my Bible, the gift of your father, spoke whimperingly.

'LET ME TOUCH YOU—A BLIND WOMAN'S HANDS ARE HER EYES.'

He said that by the order of the pastor of the regiment, whose name, being unknown to me, I cannot recall, he humbly begged my pardon, and on his knees hastened to restore to me the book. He asked also that I should intercede with the war pastor that he should not be delivered up to the provost-marshal. And this thing I did, for I had no enmity to the poor thief, who had done the thing in ignorance, or perhaps because he desired to make a present to some blind person among his relatives.

"But the German pastor of soldiers spoke yet more harshly to him than before, and opening the door, wrought violence upon the man, tumbling him down the stairs with his foot, and using many threats —or at least what sounded like such. But when he turned again to me, his words were good and gentle, though I could not understand them. He left me a paper to protect me and a piece of money, of which perhaps you can tell me the value."

"I think I can enlighten you both as to that and tell you the name of the war pastor!" said David. "He has been wounded, and now lies in my mother's house at Chaumont. It can only be Hermann Falk who did this thing, and without seeing it I will give you twenty-five francs for the piece of money."

For indeed the business scented of Hermann Falk a mile off.

And when blind Eliza had carefully extracted from its hiding-place the note of protection scribbled on a visiting-card, the money was found to be as David had predicted, and the name on the card was duly enough that of Dr. Hermann Falk, Chaplain to H.M.

the King of Prussia, and also of the Royal Colberg Grenadiers.

Many were the visits which David paid that day in the lanes and streets of Morteau. As he went, messengers to grocers and bakers seemed to start from under his feet. These good tradesmen were far from sharing the Sous-Prefect's doubts. They knew that a single line of David's handwriting was a guarantee that they would be paid for the supplies they served out to the destitute.

Even after he was long gone, shy gentlewomen, in shabby black, who had been living on pot-herbs and black bread for weeks, stole by back ways to the shops, and there, hardly lifting their eyes, bought sugar, flour, eggs, and even in some rash cases full ten sous' worth of neck of mutton, with money which had mysteriously come into their possession.

All day David, according to his ability, was the good husbandman of his mother's largesse. He made no distinction of creed, so that the *curé* of the parish, alarmed at this determined house-to-house visitation, followed in his steps, scenting proselytism; and on inquiring what the Pastor had been doing, found his flock in full tide of blessing and praise.

Late in the afternoon the two representatives of Geneva and Rome met together—the Genevan tall, young, and pale, the priest round of face and hearty, of stout peasant stock and loud of speech.

"Ah," he cried, when the two men had shaken hands, "it is a fine thing to have a rich mother over the line yonder. Yours is a better gospel for the times than any that I can preach with my empty sack.

But I thank you for all our faithful poor here. They will not be a whit the worse for a little Protestant silver. And your literature, too, is of the sort I admire, '*This is good for a loaf a day during four weeks.*' Do not be afraid, my good Pastor, your writings shall never be put on the Index. I will see to it myself."

The Curé of Morteau laughed heartily at his jest as he took his leave. He had taken a step or two up the street towards his presbytery, when he turned with a new *dalejade* on his lips, such a pleasantry as they use only in the south.

"Monsieur le Pasteur," he cried, "there is yet another poor Catholic whom you have forgotten!"

And the jolly Curé Cormod was not in the least offended when, awaking early to his matins, he found that an unknown hand had laid at his door during the night a Swiss cheese and a dozen of the sparkling wine of Chaumont-Neuchâtel.

CHAPTER XX.

WITHOUT GOD AND WITHOUT HOPE

IT was one of these sudden, inexplicable panics which, more than the bullets of war disperse irregular troops, had made an end of the formidable freebooting band of Ludovic Villars. First came a rumour that the Germans had turned sharply, and were once more marching southwards. They had been seen at Ax-le-Victoire, at Vercel-Adam, and at any moment they might top the ridge of Chaillaxon above Brenets. Then from the south there came still more alarming tidings. The men of Morteau, exasperated by the raids and plunderings of the Villars-Breslin band, were resolved upon a fight to the finish. They had the new arms which the Government were serving out, plenty of ammunition, and—what was worst—the invaders knew their haunts. Breslin's wife's brother, with whom he was at variance, led the party. It was evident that they would be swept off the face of the earth.

And so it chanced that simply and strangely, as by the wind of the nostrils of God, this band of robbers and murderers was blown into fragments. As a unity it was not. Each man fended for him-

self, without leader, without cohesion, without an object save personal plunder. Nothing remained except so many ragged tramps and possible highway robbers. When Ludovic Villars took the road to Lyons, and his big lieutenant, Breslin the smith, received orders to remain where he was till his master's return, that was the end of the "men of the mountain," who had terrorised all the Jura from Belfort to Ferney.

But as he passed down the valley of the Merac, where it rushes smoking from the Swiss uplands to the valley of the Doubs, the ex-chief chanced upon a traveller. However, he had money in his pocket, and, to do him justice, Ludovic Villars' aims were higher than those of a mere highwayman, in spite of the fact that for many months the most part of his band had been little better.

He did not, therefore, turn aside into a thicket in order to take a shot at the wayfarer as soon as he had passed. Yet the man he met was the man of all others he had the greatest reason to avoid—even David Alix.

But as for David, he had his morning face on, and saluted his step-father's son as frankly and cheerfully as he had spoken with him first in the little church, about which there still hung the strange after-communion haze—as it were the peace of another world.

"Whither away so early?" said David, as if the all that had come between them had been nothing to him. Indeed, that was a way of David's. He was not influenced greatly by what any one might do against him, but regarded rather the soul within, the

only eternal part, which might be saved or lost according as he showed himself prudent or foolish.

"I am bound on a journey beyond the bounds of *your* parish!" cried Ludovic Villars. And he would have passed on without halting in his stride. But David Alix was not the man to miss even so far-off a chance in the exercise of his function as winner of souls.

"Will you tarry and speak a little?" he asked; "I was out early looking for some strayed lambs of my mother's. But they can wait."

"I have no desire for any speech with you," said Ludovic sullenly, edging to the side of the path as if to force his way onward. But David stood before him, impassive. He held out his hand so suddenly and unexpectedly that, as if in self-defence, Ludovic's hand met it. The leader of the mountain band could not help himself. He was in the grasp of his spiritual superior. No matter that he did not believe, no matter that he was hurrying to do the work of the fiercest revolutionary. He was impressed in spite of himself. No one could look into the Pastor's eyes without at least finding faith at second-hand—that is, believing that this man believed.

It is a curious thing that in France all revolutions begin by attempting to destroy religion, to sneer faith away, to sap the belief of the youth. Indeed, coldly and of set purpose, Frenchmen of all shades of revolutionary redness unite to kill the flower, and yet continue to expect the fruit.

There is no country in the world where the crop of juvenile crime is so certain and so increasing

Nearly all the greatest French criminals of the last forty years have been under the age of twenty-one years—from Troppmann of Pantin to the latest hero of the front page of yesterday's *Matin* or *Petit Parisien.*

Yet all these were sent, at the age of eleven, to "first communion." For months before they were carefully crammed with the Roman Church Catechism. They confessed and learned to lie. They went early and late to prayers. They were, in the words of their parents, "stuffed with religion."

But, so far as the elder boys and young men are concerned, it is rare indeed that one of these eleven-year-old communicants ever sets foot within the church again, except on the strongest compulsion. Paternal example is rarely useful or, indeed, used. Even motherly tears do not, in this case, as in most others, avail. The youth would be laughed at if he went!

That is the explanation. If he belongs to a great city or the larger size of town, he will run the streets with bands of similar good-for-nothings, all carefully instructed in the Christian duties of love and obedience. These youths so trained form the "*apaches*" of Paris, the "*nervis*" of Marseilles. Nor does a single day pass without some deed of blood and horror being laid to their account. They do not rob and murder from necessity. With them it is rather an affair of honour, of spirit, of personal daring, for which they receive a sort of devil's Victoria Cross. These young criminals, by choice, take to crime as English boys do to bird-nesting and football.

The most modern examples—those which leap to

the eye in the countless illustrations of the halfpenny papers scattered by millions over the land—are the younger *débutants* in crime. No success is so sudden and certain ; no photograph is so widely distributed. Hardly even the features of the President are so widely known for the time being as those of the last and youngest murderer.

This is what the school of Paul Bert has arrived at. They chased religion out of all contact with youthful life. They carefully expunged the name of God out of the school-books to be used all over France. They reared with care a race of lay teachers to regard God as their personal enemy. The utmost care was taken to suppress all sympathy for the practice of religion by any sect of Christians, to root out all that tends to sympathy for the ideal of godliness. Religion was a laughing-stock—the school's whipping-boy.

"You are devout!" is an insult, the deepest which can be offered to a French boy at a Government school to-day, worse even than to call him "a Christian"!

Nor can I say that the towns with a large Protestant population are very much better. Nîmes also has its "*nervis*." Montpellier holds a local record for precocious crime. It is true that only a few of these belong to the Protestant faith. But the fact is, that the most consistent and militant atheists are found among the sons of old Protestant families. I have seen it again and again.

Certainly there are many wise and good pastors of the late official Protestant Church in France. There are among them scholars and gentlemen, good talkers,

far-seeing politicians, hiding away beside their little "temples" in unobtrusive corners of their parishes. But somehow these are without honour in their own country. The people knows them not. They make no feature in the social landscape. They have blotted themselves out from off the face of the earth, and it is by no means thus that a Frenchman is to be influenced, or France to be won.

So it comes about that of all the religious influences at work in France the two which have most actual effect upon the people are the "Église Libre" and the Evangelical Society of Geneva. Their work, at any rate, is likely to be more effective than that of foreigners speaking imperfect French, no matter with what unction and fervour. Laughter blights in France anywhere from Perpignan to Dunkerque.

French-speaking men, French or Swiss trained, zealous of good works, seen of the people, going from door to door, speaking on village greens, at workshop gates, giving "conferences" here and there on the questions of the day, alert, witty, ready of reply, and in especial equipped to give a reason for the faith that is in them—these are the men who are, unobtrusively and silently, but very really, leavening France with the teaching of the Carpenter's Son.

Since the disestablishment and disendowment of the official Protestant Church, I have, however, noticed a considerable improvement. The pastors have worked more; they have put themselves in evidence. Their bread is no longer given to them; their water is no longer sure. The trial has done them a world of good. Because, whatever naturalists may say,

the sloth is man's nearest affinity in the animal kingdom.

* * * * *

But all these recent events were only in the egg in the days of Ludovic Villars, of Pastor David Alix, during those last days of the Year Terrible, which ended with the dark and bloody May of 1871.

"I have to speak with you," repeated David Alix to his house's enemy. He had not kept hold of the hand he had grasped a moment longer than was necessary. He had that innate sense which teaches a man to leave well alone.

"And you have to say—what?" demanded the advocate-bushwhacker. "Let me have no preaching stuff; I have heard all that. I am in no mood to be wept over or forgiven; the People are at last alive. They are going to speak after their long silence; this sham Republic of yours will not satisfy them. It is the day of the Great Overturning, and you and all those who have taken money unjustly shall be called upon to disgorge!"

"The labourer is worthy of his hire," said David cheerfully. "I could have made more with the spade—had I been called to dig instead of to sow. You are quite welcome to all the money I am ever likely to have, and such as I can beg or borrow, I give to the poor. No revolution will get much out of me!"

"Except your blood when your head falls for misleading the people!" interrupted Ludovic, in a sudden burst of fierceness.

"My hour is not yet come," said David, still smiling.

'AND YOU HAVE TO SAY—WHAT?' DEMANDED THE ADVOCATE-BUSHWHACKER.

"Till God, the potter, breaks the vessel He himself has made, no one else shall throw it on the shard-heap!"

"A man named Robespierre, who was of your faith, once presided over a rather large pile of shards!" the advocate reminded him with a sneer.

"Their work was done," said David Alix gently; "when mine is—Robespierre or another—little will it matter to me."

"And how much, think you, will remain of your work a year after you are on the shard-heap?"

But the Pastor was not in the least put out by the prospect.

"Then I should be honoured indeed," he said; "there was Another who was despised and rejected of men!"

The Red Republican tossed his head furiously. It is hard to argue with any Frenchman. It is impossible with a revolutionist. Head, therefore, was no good. So David Alix made a last appeal to the heart—which sometimes, under an infinity of husk, remains strangely sound at the kernel.

"If ever you are in dire need," he called after Ludovic, as he left him, "remember that my Master is He Who forgives sin, and that my sister and I will come from the ends of the earth to help you!"

But the revolutionary held his way towards his fate, without answering or giving the least sign. Nevertheless his armour was jointed. He had heard.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RED REVOLT

LUDOVIC VILLARS had taken the straight road to Paris after the failure at Lyons. He meant to join the men of the 18th March who had raised the red flag of the Commune. From every corner of Europe men were hastening to Paris on a similar errand. From the philosopher of revolution, Blanqui, called "Le Vieux," to mere desperadoes in search of plunder and office, Paris drew to her the Children of Revolt. It was a Cave of Adullam without a David, Holy City for dreamers of Utopias, a place of arms for professional cut-throats—this fold of defenceless sheep, which had called in the wolves to govern it.

And, in good truth, the wolves hastened thither in packs, each snarling at the other, lest his neighbour should forestall him at the banquet. And of all these beasts of prey on the gallop towards the City of Light, lately the envy of the nations, none fiercer or more unscrupulous took the road than Ludovic Villars, son of the disgraced banker of St. Gabriel. He was not only a workman skilled in his trade, and therefore of the people, but also a trained lawyer, ready with his pen, fluent and persuasive in speech, and convinced

that he was heart and soul with the poor against the rich.

In reality, this was chiefly the rancour of an embittered youth, raging at the hardness of fate, and condemned to grow to manhood in a region where stains upon family honour are counted much worse than personal transgressions.

But when Ludovic, the lettered artisan, the would-be insurgent, arrived within the region of Paris, he found that he was already too late. The city was blocked by the troops of Versailles. New regiments, released from their captivity in Germany, were constantly arriving, and soon the late captain of the "Bassins" band found himself in a position of great danger. After being foiled in several attempts on the east and south, he made a great détour to try his fortune on the north. At St. Denis he fell in with a party of Germans, Uhlans of the Berlin regiment, and being unable to give any satisfactory account of his presence there, he was handed over to the authorities of Versailles.

Here he chanced upon a piece of good fortune. He might have passed immediately to prison, and perhaps before a firing-party on the plateau of Sartory, but that in the examining magistrate before whom he appeared, he recognised a companion of the law school of Montpellier.

"Gustave!"

"Ludovic!"

All the impulsive Midi cried aloud unanimously, and as prisoner and magistrate embraced each other, shrugs and smiles went the round of the gendarmes

and officers assembled in the cabinet of the *Juge d'instruction.*

Well it was for Ludovic Villars that the reign of the councils of war sitting in permanence had not yet begun. Yet there was enough to render him unquiet.

The sight at Asnières of half-a-dozen men in the uniform of the National Guards set against a wall and shot for the crime of being caught breakfasting in an inn on the wrong side of the river, had suddenly cooled his revolutionary ardours. He was willing to fight—indeed, he felt the wrongs of the workers as strongly as ever. But these six live men, in a moment fallen so limp and so ignoble, achieved the transformation of the revolted patriot into the lawyer of the bar of Montpellier.

"Why, Villars, what are you doing here?" demanded his friend, "and how came you into the hands of the Germans?"

"I was escaping from Paris," said Ludovic readily, "I came up to see what could be done as to my father's inheritance. I wish to clear his memory from stain. I have discovered recently that he died a rich man in Switzerland."

"Very proper," said his friend; "depend upon me to aid you when the time comes. But, in the meantime, there is nothing to be done—no judges, no courts, nothing but what you see. We are just emerging from chaos. But you used to be ready with your tongue. Let me see, were you not imprisoned under the Empire? That should stand in your favour. You will get something good from Gambetta. Besides, he loves us who are of his country. Cahors is near to

Montpellier and next door to Provence. But I counsel you not to show yourself too advanced. Here at Versailles it is easy that does it. The reaction is coming. Then there will be a crop of new cases to defend. Stand on the left centre, as I do myself. Meanwhile, come to lunch with me, and I will introduce you to Gambetta in the afternoon."

Valreas was as good as his word, and though the Dictator had for the moment lost his omnipotence and some of his popularity in the Assembly, he had yet great influence privately. All the world knew that when the fury of reaction should have spent itself, he must again lead France.

To afford the novice some practice in administration, Ludovic was taken into the bureau of the Prefect of Seine-et-Oise. What he saw there soon convinced him that the revolt of Paris had no chance, and that, if he had succeeded in passing into the city to take part in it, his career would have ended swiftly by bullet or bayonet.

As was his habit, Ludovic juggled curiously with his conscience. He was, he told himself, no turncoat. He was as earnest a revolutionary as ever, but the moment was not propitious. He must mount the staircase of power before he could be of use to his friends. One thing troubled him. He had been concerned in the abortive Communist rising at Lyons. He had written many letters to Assi, whom he had known previously during the famous Carmieux strike. He had assured the chiefs in Paris that both the great towns of Lyons and Marseilles would hoist the red flag at the first attack upon the capital.

The Men of the Mountain

Placed as he was in the offices of the Procurator, Ludovic was made uneasy by the denunciations which came pouring in. It was possible at any moment that the letters he had written might in like manner turn up to accuse him. Nay, was it not likely that the Commune of Paris would publish them in their own "Official Gazette" in order to put heart into their followers, and to prove to them that they did not stand alone.

His friend, Gustave Valreas, having been relieved from his post of instructional judge by the advent of military authority and martial law, had gone back to purely civil functions. His bureau was established in another and opposite wing of the department to which Ludovic Villars was attached. The great and ready, if sometimes shallow, sympathy of the south grew up between these two. They became inseparable. They lunched and dined together, and in that overcrowded Versailles of the later Commune, were for a time glad to share the same bedroom on the fourth floor of a cheap hotel, swarming with the rank and file of the public offices.

Valreas was in all respects a pattern official. His ideas were few, slow, and mediocre, but he understood his business, and within its limits was competent. He had at Versailles few friends and no intimates, except his old college companion—his "*copain*," as he called him. Indeed, only the love of his native province moved Valreas. Outside of his enthusiasm for *la petite patrie* he clothed himself with the cold imperturbability of a man of the north.

Yet to him Ludovic told such a version of his story

as it was possible to put before a magistrate. He showed him his father's papers, which he had sent for from his aunt in St. Gabriel. The failure had certainly not been honourable, agreed Valreas, but the creditors were few, and, for the country, rich men. If money could be got together, he had no doubt that Ludovic might effect a composition with them. Nay, he would gladly charge himself with the affair whenever the son felt himself in a position to clear his father's honour. It was a noble and disinterested thing to do, the magistrate added, because after all France was wide, and Ludovic was not shut in to choose either St. Gabriel or even Provence as a residence. Outside these places no one had ever heard either of his father or of himself.

Having made this good beginning, Ludovic Villars cautiously approached the matter which he had really at heart. Valreas knew his youthful headstrongness. He had been condemned under the Empire for sedition. This, on his release, had for a time made him a hater of all authority. He had even been led into greater extremes. He had been the captain of a band of unlicensed *franc-tireurs* in the eastern departments, and had been drawn by the *élan* of his corps into proceedings which, he was now aware, could not be defended.

"Were the Germans in the country?" asked Valreas.

"They were retiring out of Jura into the direction of the Doubs, sweeping all such Free Companies as ours out of the way, and shooting us out of hand whenever they could catch us."

"In that case you have little to fear, save private vendettas. But is there nothing else, Villars? I know your hot blood."

"I will tell you," said Ludovic, with real solemnity and some fear; "I know that I can depend upon you. The matter is, that I was at Lyons during the troubles there. I was one of those who received the delegates from Paris, and in my capacity of advocate I was charged to draw up the replies."

"Signing them with your own hand?" asked Valreas, looking as grave as his companion.

"No, not so bad as that," said Ludovic, "but in corresponding afterwards with the Commune at Paris, I had the incredible folly to sign my name and quality! It was a mere piece of vanity."

"Ah," said Valreas, in a low tone, "that is bad. What made you do that? You used to be farther-sighted at Montpellier, where they called you the Fox. Surely you could not suppose that these men, the scum of the Paris workshops, could possibly succeed against France?"

"But," Ludovic objected, "at that time none of us knew that the battle would be against France. The Bordeaux people were discredited by the shameful treaty, the soldiers made bitter by the disgrace of unbroken defeats. They had fraternised with the revolutionists before; they easily might again. Indeed, on the 18th of March they did so!"

Valreas shook his head with gloomy contempt.

"True, there are many who have dipped as deep as you," he said; "the Mayors of Paris, for example. Only they made their peace earlier; they stopped short

of the barricades. It is now, I fear, too late for you to make any peace by confession. We may only hope that these accursed letters may not turn up to spoil a very promising career. That charge of yours yesterday in the case of the Poissy prisoners was much admired."

"What, then, would you advise me to do?" said Ludovic. "It is not so much that I care about myself, as that I have a work before me which ought to be done—which must be done, if I am to retrieve my father's good name."

"I understand," said Valreas, reaching out a hand to his friend; "for myself, I do not blame your heart, though I cannot congratulate you on your judgment. Still, I had not just been released from prison when I chose my side, and I judge no man harshly for having been led beyond his depth in these rough times."

"Then you think that there is no hope for me?" said Villars despondently.

"By no means, my friend," said Valreas. "See here. Continue your work and establish a good reputation here. That will always serve you in the future, and no one knows what turns there may be of Fortune's wheel. Now listen! Whatever accusation is made against you will assuredly pass, if not under my hands, at least through my department. Therefore do you tranquilly go on with your work. You can see the windows of my bureau from where you sit—straight across the quadrangle yonder. If anything bad comes out, I will spill some ink on my gown and hang it out of the window to dry. It

will make a famous black danger-signal on the white wall."

"But at night?" objected Ludovic.

"The nights are short at present. I will have a camp-bed placed in my closet, and sleep there on pretext of pressure of work. It is necessary in order that I may be of use to you that you and I should not be seen together. Besides, such devotion to duty will bring its own reward."

They separated after this talk, each to his own business, but the heart of Ludovic Villars grew each day more troubled and anxious, as the work of subduing the insurgent city went forward. Danger he had no objection to looking in the face, but waiting interminably on for the axe to fall—that, he owned, was another matter.

Worst of all, in his heart of hearts he saw the failure of all his ambitions. He had set out to make himself the tribune of the hard-driven city toiler. At the head of such a movement he had seen himself conquering an old and rotten social order. That hope had foundered under his feet. The conviction that he was not strong enough for these things fell upon him. He had been afraid when the Germans took him at St. Denis; he had quaked at the sight of the executions of Asnières. In especial he could not get the image of one sergeant of the National Guard out of his brain; he himself wore the same cut of beard, and—would look just so.

And as for his revenge upon these people away on the Upper Doubs—supposing that he had it—would it not also turn into the gall of bitterness upon his tongue?

CHAPTER XXII.

MOTHER AND SON

FROM crowded, angry, dusty Versailles the tale flies gladly back to the clear sweet airs of the *bassins* and the chill that takes the brow as we climb the ridges towards Chaumont or that pretty double-doored cottage of the little schoolmistress.

After a week spent on foot in the most distant part of his territory, David Alix came slowly up the valley from Le Lac. It was late afternoon, and he would have given much to be able to visit Jean Heller and his wife Anna in their farm kitchen of Les Bassettes. The simple life, the honest affection of their united destiny were dear to him. He was more at ease there than in any other house of all his wide and scattered people. But he thought of his mother. She had a curious prejudice against Jean and Anna, or at least against his going there. She would be offended if, after so long an absence, he played tardy-foot at Les Bassettes.

So with a sigh he resigned himself to pass above the white farmhouse and the little school-cottage with its beaten-brown playground. Thus he would be able to see the open windows of the schoolroom, and the outbuilding of the farm. Jean was evidently busy

with his hay down on the water's edge, but he caught a glimpse of Madame Anna with a brass preserving-pan in her hand. He could see it glitter as she cleaned it with much expenditure of elbow-grease, and he knew that the good housewife was getting ready for the "blaeberry" harvest on the sides of the pass above, when all the ground would be carpeted with the fruit, and the hill birds would leave on every stone and boulder the purple stains of their orgies.

In spite of what Hermann Falk had said (or perhaps because of it), David could not help lingering to note whether the school was not on the point of being dismissed. The sound of children's voices came to his ear, lingering and sweet in their parting song, as if scented by the thymy slopes between.

Now was his opportunity. The infants were certainly coming out, and it would be strange if the little schoolmistress did not accompany them. But David Alix, taken with a sudden panic, which was not all because of his mother, made haste to cross the irregularly accidented plateau in the direction of his home.

Madame met him on the doorstep of Villars Chaumont and kissed him with unwonted tenderness. There was not a word of remonstrance as to his having stayed away too long. Nor, what was still more remarkable, any question as to his route homeward.

"Did you get my letter from Salon?" said David, vaguely wondering what was the matter with the lady his mother. There was a difference somewhere, but David, inexpert and inattentive as to women's attire, did not notice that she had adopted a more dainty and far more juvenile costume than the severe, short-

skirted black dress which it had been her wont to wear in the house for more years than he could remember.

"Your letter," his mother answered distraitly—"yes, certainly you told me that if the weather held you would complete your tour in the low country before returning."

But David, acute enough in all that concerned his work, knew in a moment that his mother had thought no more about the matter.

"I have spent all your money, Madame," he said smilingly, "and in fact, so bad was the state of things at Salon le Meunier, that I had to borrow two hundred francs from the innkeeper there. I have besides run myself, which is to say you, somewhat deeply into debt for bread and groceries at Morteau!"

Somehow his mother appeared relieved. She had lost her sharpness of manner, and contrary to her habit, she showed no haste to look over his accounts. She almost seemed to desire his good-humour and approval.

"All that you wish, son David," she said, looking up at him, "unto the half of my kingdom!"

Then she took his arm with surprising grace and youth.

"And Noélie?" cried David—"why has the idle brat not come down to see me? Surely her headache——"

"I have to speak to you of Noélie—this way, David!" interrupted his mother, leading the way into her own little parlour on the ground floor off the hall. It was a room she occupied but little, and though the window

was opened every day and closed each evening, the place always smelt a little of dead rose-leaves, furniture polish, and the frames of old engravings.

Much surprised, David Alix followed his mother. It was the first time in his life that Madame had consulted him about his half-sister, or indeed upon anything connected with her second marriage.

She bade him sit down, but he continued to remain standing for some time. Madame David the Elder was evidently perturbed, and her hands, never restful at the best of times, played nervously with a carved paper-knife she had caught up.

"Is anything wrong, mother?" said David tenderly.

"Wrong—wrong?" cried his mother, with testy vigour—"why, what should there be wrong?"

"What is it about Noélie?"

His mother's face hardened, and she drew down her mouth threateningly at the corners.

"Noélie," she said, "has been very unsatisfactory and—disobedient."

"Noélie—disobedient!" David exclaimed, aghast, "impossible!"

His mother thrust out her hands as if to push him away, and a glint of strange anger sprang to the sloe-black eyes.

"And pray, why impossible?" she cried; "surely you are not going to take her part against your own mother!"

"Nothing was farther from my mind," said David gently; "but as I do not yet know what Noélie has said or done, would I not be equally wrong to take part against her?"

Mother and Son

Madame David the Elder stamped her foot, and, suddenly losing all self-control, began to rail furiously. "You are a prig, David, I have always known it. Where is your religion—where is your Bible when you will not take your mother's word? Have you forgotten your ten commandments? Do they mean nothing to you? Answer me! Have I lost both children together? As for Noélie, I always knew her to be selfish and without natural affection, but I *did* think that I could depend upon you, David!"

With all the gentleness and tenderness that was in his nature David set himself to soothe his mother, and to try and draw from her what was the root and crown of Noélie's wrongdoing. But for long without effect. Her children had risen in rebellion against her. She had often been warned that she reared them with too much tenderness, but now the truth had come bitterly home to her.

"Listen, mother," said David, sitting down and, though she turned away her head, laying a hand upon his mother's shoulder, "tell me what is the blame which you have to lay upon Noélie. Has she been disobedient or wilful?"

"Both," said his mother, "and yet she has covered them over so well that when I tell you, you are certain to take her part against me!"

David was silent, knowing that his mother would not be content to let the matter rest thus. Nor was he mistaken. She broke out again, upon himself this time.

"And you, you yourself have been the cause of all this——"

"I, mother?" David was amazed beyond measure.

"Yes, you," repeated more loudly the angry woman —"you brought the Herr Military Chaplain Falk here to this house, and now, if you please, Noélie has her head turned about him!"

David could hardly check the laugh that rose to his lips. But his trained professional gravity saved him —and indeed he did not laugh much except when, as in the present case, taken completely by surprise.

"Hermann Falk—dear old Falk!" he exclaimed. "Impossible, mother!"

And he remained divided in astonishment between his mother's strange infatuation with regard to Noélie, and the astounding fact that she called the King of Prussia's servant by his formal title.

"The Herr Military Chaplain Falk," he murmured to himself, "and my mother comes from Alsace!"

"It is true," she said, becoming more excited by his silence; "I found them sitting together. He had Noélie's hand in his, and was pretending to tell her fortune!"

"The hardened ruffian!" muttered David, but under his breath.

"Of course I ordered Noélie instantly out of the room, and she had the assurance to ask why!"

"What depravity!" thought David. But his mind, accustomed to take the tone of others' moods, divined easily that something was concealed under all this.

"Well, mother," he said, "I do not see that any great harm has been done. Remember that you have left Noélie to nurse my friend all these many weeks. He is older and wiser than our little one, and I will

pledge my honour that no word or thought of his has not been to his honour. He is incapable of deceit."

"Oh," said Madame quickly, "I am not blaming the Herr Military Chaplain and I make not the least doubt that he was heartily sick of such girlish folly. He is a man of mature years and ripe faculties."

"He is six years my senior," said David, "and holds a great position in his own country. If he should marry, his wife would be both a happy and an honoured woman."

"I do not say to the contrary," said his mother, "but it is out of the question to think of anything of the kind in Noélie's case! She is a mere child, and half-a-dozen years hence it will be quite soon enough to think of marriage!"

"Has it ever occurred to you, mother," he continued, "that in a year Noélie will be her own mistress?"

Madame Villars started as if stung. Her pale face flushed crimson. "Noélie will never be her own mistress till I choose," she cried; "every penny of her father's money is mine as long as I live. Hold—I will prove it to you!"

"Do not, I beg of you, mother," said David, again restraining her with gentle compulsion; "I have no right, and I desire to know nothing of such things. But I did not speak of money. You will remember that *I* have to ask your permission to marry, because I am a French subject. But both you and Noélie are Swiss subjects. So in a year Noélie will be free to marry whomsoever she likes."

"Then she will be a pauper," cried Madame, rising

to her feet, "she shall beg her bread from door to door. No, I will NOT sit down, David. Not a penny of money shall she ever handle if she marries against my will."

"But what," the Pastor continued, with the still gentle persistence which made him formidable—"what if Noélie were determined to wed a rich man—or for that matter a poor one—she could do it without your permission."

"You would say, if you dared, that the Herr Chaplain is a rich man and that you would marry them willingly. I thought as much. I knew to which side your sympathies would lean."

"I said nothing of the kind," said David. "I was only supposing what I hope will never happen—that our house should be divided against itself."

"I decline to consider such a thing," cried Madame David the Elder; "I will be obeyed within my own house, by Noélie and by you also."

"I trust that I shall never be found wanting in any filial duty," said David gravely. But secretly he shrugged his shoulders at his mother's infatuation, and was not a little perturbed how to act. He felt impotent against anger so foolish and futile. But a new thought struck him.

"I have been at Morteau, and there I saw the officials of the new Government from Paris. So far as the Germans are concerned, peace is made. Hermann is therefore at liberty to return home as soon as he is sufficiently recovered."

"But he is far from being well," broke in Madame; "indeed, since I took his nursing in hand, I have been

able to find out two or three symptoms that have escaped all the doctors. One of these is an extreme melancholy."

"Do you, then, wish me to use my influence with Noélie, and to what purpose?" David asked, resigning himself to the ungrateful task of adjusting these feminine troubles.

To this at first Madame returned no answer. She had indeed been on the point of saying brusquely, "Certainly you shall not see Noélie with my good-will." But the thought that she could not hope permanently to sequester her daughter in the house of Chaumont caused her to agree to his proposal. She produced a key from her pocket and threw it across the table.

"What," said David, starting and flushing with secret indignation, "surely you have never locked her in?"

"But I have," cried his mother, "and what is more, I will keep her there till she confesses to me, and gives me the promise to which, as her mother, I have the right. But go to her and prove that you have not used all your good counsel upon strangers, and that you can still lead a rebellious girl to contrition and obedience to her mother and to the commandments of God."

David, troubled in heart and uncertain what to say when he should find himself face to face with his sister, went slowly upstairs, knitting his brows, the key of his sister's door swinging on his finger.

He knocked, but got no reply from within.

"Poor Noélie," he thought, "this is hard on her. She is humiliated—perhaps crying. I have seen her

like that when she had chanced to fall across mother on one of her black days."

He turned the key in the lock, and knocked again before entering.

"It is I, David," he said. "Where are you, little one?"

But there was still the same silence, and with a bound he was within the apartment. Noélie's last meal, placed there by her mother, lay untouched on the table. But Noélie was not anywhere in the room

CHAPTER XXIII.

"PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF"

DAVID went down to break to his mother the news of what he had discovered. Nevertheless he did not disquiet himself overmuch, because he recalled various wilful episodes of Noélie's girlhood. She had always, even as a child, had the strongest sense of injustice. Ordinarily submissive and gentle, she revolted easily when she considered herself punished without cause.

So now David had not the least inkling of anything more serious than an escapade of caprice, entered into as a protest against her mother's severity. But when Madame heard his tale, she grew suddenly pale under her new cap-ribbons, and without word, set off towards the east wing of Château Villars. David followed her. He was exceedingly amazed that his mother had not instantly gone to his sister's room to judge for herself. It almost seemed as if she had been expecting the summons.

It was wholly without ceremony that Madame David the Elder opened the door of the chamber in which Hermann Falk had been nursed from the first. The Military Chaplain was sitting smoking by the open window, a wrap which David recognised as one

of his mother's best Cashmere shawls thrown about his shoulders. A book was on Hermann's knees, but to all appearance he had been dreamily regarding the evening light reddening the slopes and ridges of the Swiss Jura.

He turned with a smile of welcome on his face, with, as it seemed, some expectancy also, which may have been because he had heard on the stair without the firm footstep of David Alix. His face fell a little when Madame burst impetuously in upon him. He regarded her wonderingly without speaking.

"Have you seen Noélie?" she cried, without any prelude of greeting.

"Seen Noélie?" repeated the Military Chaplain. "Why, I thought she was ill. I have not had a visit from my little nurse for a week!"

"Then you know nothing about her leaving the house?" Madame demanded, going up close to Hermann Falk and looking him fixedly in the eyes. The Chaplain of the Colbergers shook his head, and looked over Madame's shoulder at David for an explanation. Why, he wondered, should such a question be asked of him? What was it that Madame Villars could possibly suspect?

But he did not speak out this protest. He had been greatly indebted to all in that house, and besides, in a little, he meditated philosophically, David would tell him all about it.

"I can only regret," he answered composedly, "that I have not had the chance of informing myself as to your daughter's plans. As you know, I only see what passes immediately beneath my window."

As he was translating carefully from the German of his thought, his words might have appeared a little stilted. No one, however, could mistake his perfect sincerity. Madame turned sharply on her heel and went out, leaving the two men gazing bewildered at each other. David followed to the door, listened there to his mother's footsteps as they rang sharp on the iron bridge, and at last ceased with the banging of the door which gave access to the main body of the house. Then he gently closed that of Hermann's room, and came back to his friend near the window.

He sat down on the window-sill and both were silent for a long minute.

"What is all this about?" said David. "I have been away for a week, and now I do not in the least know what anybody means, least of all my mother."

"I wish I could enlighten you," said the Chaplain, meeting his eye frankly, "but the truth is, I understand as little about it as you—less perhaps. Ever since you went away, Madame, your good mother, has waited upon me herself, and that with wonderful kindness. But when I asked for Mademoiselle Noélie, I was informed that she was in her room, much fatigued, and unable to come down."

"Would you like to know what prevented her?" said David, a little grimly, and he held out the key of his sister's room, which, in the bewilderment of finding her absent, he had instinctively kept in his hand. The two men looked steadily at each other, but it was a look of undimmed confidence.

"It appears to me that I have been long enough with you," said the Military Chaplain, smiling.

"Or not long enough," retorted David Alix. "Come, Hermann, let us get to the bottom of this as far as we can. Be sure that my mother will do all that is necessary to find Noélie and to bring her home."

"Very well," said the Chaplain. "I can only believe that Madame has thought so meanly of me that she suspects me of making love to her daughter under her roof."

"Or," struck in David, "that she believes Noélie is in danger of doing the same thing."

This time the Chaplain flushed brightly enough, and waved his hand deprecatingly, but not ill-pleased.

"That is impossible—a rough old fellow like me!" he muttered; "besides, I never thought of, never hoped for, such a thing. We were, as you know, a great deal thrown together. She read to me charmingly. She spoke my language, which was like home to a sick man, and waited on me with the most perfect patience. But in all she was only the child, simple, playful, and charming, whom you know!"

"And has anything happened during the week since I saw you?" David asked.

"Little enough, except what I tell you," the Chaplain answered. "Madame replaced her daughter in my chamber. She spent a great part of each day with me. She read to me from the book that Noélie had left unfinished, and in every detail undertook to supply her place. Often I remonstrated with her, because I knew how busy she must be. She must not, I represented, neglect her house and business for a lame dog who could amuse himself well enough with his

book and the window. But except when, out of politeness, I asked for Mademoiselle Noélie every morning, her name was never mentioned. Madame answered simply that she was still indisposed."

David thought deeply, striving to fathom the mystery of his mother's conduct; but, perhaps because he was her son, none appeared to him.

"All *I* know is that as soon as I arrived mother accused Noélie of disobedience and undutifulness," he said. "But I understood it as merely some hastiness of temper on one side or the other, which would soon blow over if let alone."

"But Noélie," said the Chaplain, knitting his brows; "I do not understand. Has she really left the house?"

"Noélie is too good a girl to cause unnecessary pain," said David, "but she has much quick spirit, and might do a foolish act without considering the consequences."

"Well, you must seek her," said the Chaplain; "come and tell me as soon as you have a clue. I should never forgive myself if——"

But David interrupted him. "I decline as yet to take any serious view of the business. There has been a quarrel after the week of confinement in her room. As likely as not she is to be found at the top of one of the trees in the orchard!"

David went down and left Hermann Falk alone. The Military Chaplain let his pipe go out, and with his eyes fixed on the distant horizon meditated deeply.

"Clearly," he said to himself, as he watched the mists gather in the valleys towards Le Lochle. "I

must get out of this as soon as possible. It will never do for Hermann Falk to set up as Lovelace in his old age. And how I am to repay these good people, I know not. Hermann, Hermann, if only you had a dozen years less to your reckoning—and were not more afraid of a slip of a girl than of a French battery! Ah, well—it will soon be over, and you back preaching against the folly of men and women in the Altkirche from the excellent text, 'Physician, heal thyself!'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRAIL OF THE WILD CAT

DURING David's absence a ladder had been found leaning against the wall of the orchard at a place where an escalade was easy enough. But there was no evidence to show how it had found its way there, and the pavement beneath Noélie's window was too hard to show any imprint. All that was clear was that, if she had really escaped, she could not have done it without assistance from without.

Madame had taken her dinner up at the family hour of noon, and it remained untouched on the table where she had laid it down. Noélie had been sitting with her back to the door when her mother entered. She had risen respectfully, as always, and had stood with her head bowed and her eyes on the carpet while her mother remained in the room. But Madame, being exceedingly displeased, turned sharply about and marched out without uttering a word. She admitted now that she believed that she heard sobbing as the door closed. But she had persevered, in the hope and confidence that the heart of her rebellious daughter was being softened.

"Would such a course have softened you, mother, when you were Noélie's age?" David asked, in that

gentle voice at which even an angry woman could hardly take offence.

"*I* was never rebellious or disobedient to my mother!" snapped Madame.

"I have heard," continued David, "that my maternal grandmother died when you were a baby, and also it has been whispered to me how a certain young lady of Alsace ran away from her home to marry a poor pastor of the Reformed faith!"

"This is no time to jest," said his mother impatiently, "nor is there now any question of marriage—we must find your sister, and make her come back instantly."

"To be locked up?" David ventured. "I fear that will be a poor inducement. Have I your authority to say that you forgive everything if I find her? And also to promise that she shall not again be shut up? She is really too old to be treated like a naughty child."

"Let her then cease to be a naughty child!" cried his mother, and hastened out of the room to escape further argument.

By this time the château swarmed like a hive. Messengers were sent out in every direction, while the boatmen on the lake of Brenets plied up and down in the clear green waters, searching out each cave and inlet.

It was indeed strange how, from a frequented house, between the hours of noon and six of a summer day, a young girl had been able to escape without a soul having seen her. The sun had shone without a single cloud all the afternoon. There had been a slight wind from the north which had loomed out the valley

haze, and the air was so translucent that a figure could be seen in any direction for miles, either approaching or leaving the house of Villars Chaumont.

After a reconnaissance through the orchard and the little pine-wood behind, to make sure that the truant was not hiding among any of the tree-tops with a book and an apple, as she was wont to do many and many a hot summer afternoon, David struck across the fells in the direction of the Hellers' farm.

It was quite possible that his sister might be there, for Alice Brante and she had been friends in the days before the embargo on intercourse had been made so strict. At any rate, Jean Heller had been all day down by the *bassins* at his hay-making. He would be in a position to command both the bridge to Le Lac and Les Fins, and the road by the waterside highway to Morteau. That Noélie had not taken the upper hill path, David knew from his own observation, for he had returned home that way.

But at Les Bassettes there was no news. Jean had come in and was splashing in the court behind, under the great chestnut, cooling himself after the heat of the day's labour in the sun. Anna was setting the table, and called out with pleasure at sight of the Pastor. The little schoolmistress had not yet come in. She had told Anna that she would be busy with her registers and school log-book, and would work quietly alone in the porch of her cottage.

Thither David hurried, but though Alice Brante rose with a kindly light in her eyes at his appearance, she had neither heard from nor seen Noélie. Madame Heller pressed David to wait and take supper with

them, for he had eaten little all day, and had again come out without anything. But he was determined to press on.

He knew that of all the auxiliaries whom it was possible to enlist, the most hopeful were the outlaw of Pierre-à-Feu and his son the Wild Cat. But whether he should be successful or not in this depended entirely on the mood in which he might find them.

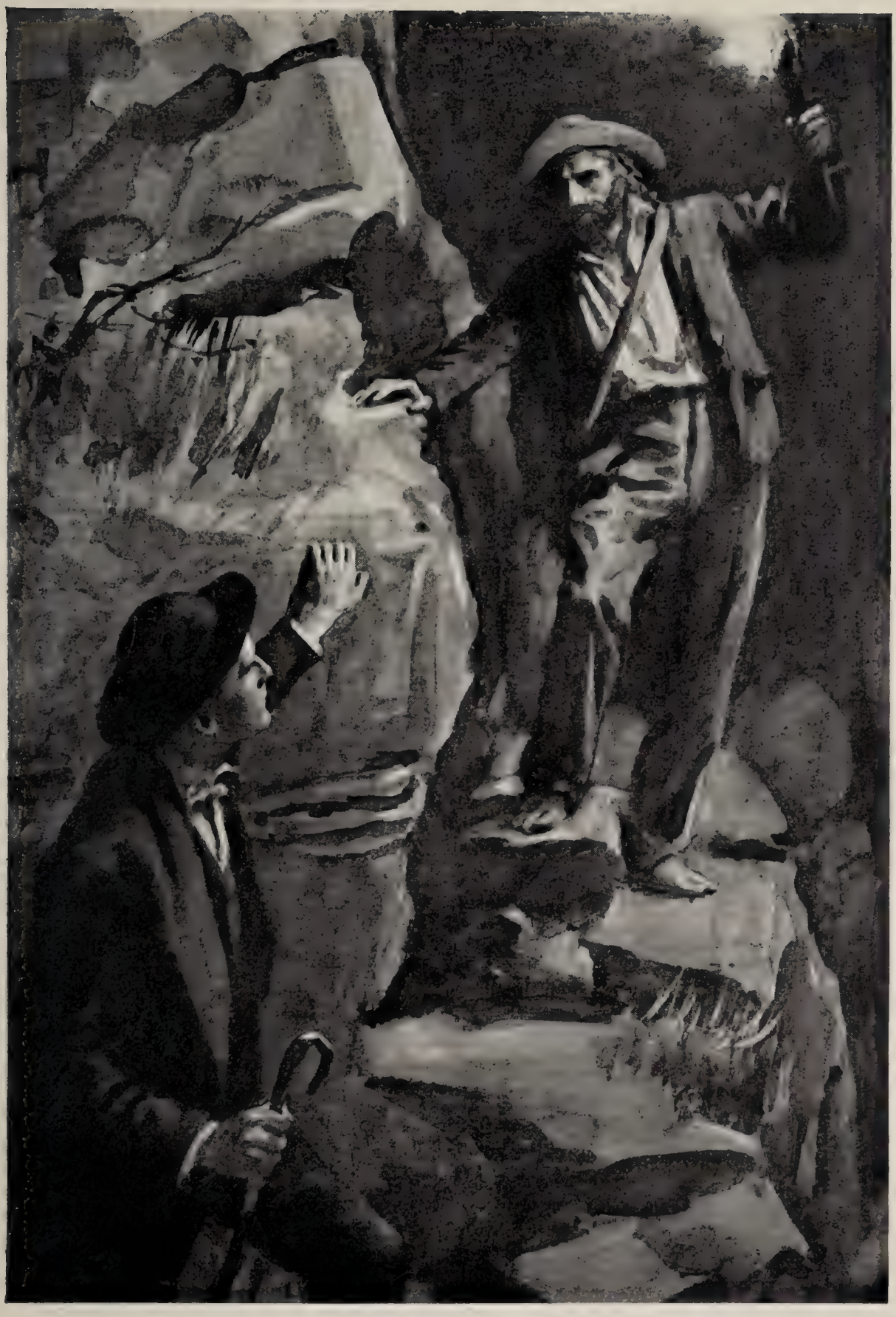
It was growing dusk when the Pastor arrived in the vicinity of the den of Black Leo. Gradually as he advanced there came on him the old feeling that his movements were watched by invisible eyes. But he went on, calling out at intervals, "Leo, Leo—it is I, Pastor Alix!"

He knew better than to venture unannounced into these solitudes. He knew the road perfectly, but it was with added confidence that he saw a light before him on the face of the rugged hill. It was not steady, but seemed to flicker about, like one who with a lantern looks for something on the ground.

David approached nearer with the same confidence of protection that he always felt in difficult situations.

"Ho there, Leo," he shouted, "come out and speak with Pastor David Alix!"

A bright light shone out at the final turning of the narrow goats' path. He looked up. There, within a dozen yards of him, was Black Leo, holding in his hand a huge torch of pitch-pine, which shone out on the rugged hillside, on the wild features of the outlaw, and threw up into the sky a hovering column of ruddy smoke.



THERE WITHIN A DOZEN YARDS OF HIM WAS BLACK LEO.

The man of Pierre-à-Feu conducted the Pastor to his rock dwelling. This time he motioned him to enter, and in his honour lighted a home-made lamp simply constructed of cotton-wick floating on a saucer of grease — all without a word spoken on either side.

But when David opened out his mission, the interest and curiosity of the outlaw became strongly marked. To seek—to track — to find — these were his own specialities. Wide-eyed and open-mouthed, he leaned forward on his stone seat, and watched David's face, as he told the tale of how his sister had been lost. The reason for Noélie's flight mattered nothing to him. He was a tracker, and even now his hands shook with very eagerness to be off. David and he would return to Chaumont during the night, and await in some place of concealment, descending upon the château with the first streaks of day. The man of Pierre-à-Feu was wholly unable to conduct his business under the light of the sun. He had enemies who might pounce on him even when upon so honest an undertaking as the present. Besides, after all, he knew that he worked best under the feeble light of the stars or in the vague dusk of the earliest dawn.

But on their way back to the château, after passing high above the farm of Les Bassettes (where the Hellers and the little schoolmistress had already extinguished their lights), they were just about to descend into the Ravine of Logemont when the trained ear of Black Leo was attracted by a movement in a bush of broom. To David it was only one of the night-raking beasts he was accustomed to

hear moving about his path when he came home late.

But with a rush Leo plunged his hand into the thicket, and brought out something small and black, which screeched and bit and kicked at arm's length, as the outlaw held it up against the sky.

The man of Pierre-à-Feu growled hoarse imprecations. He threatened to knock the head of the kicking and struggling object against a stone. He cuffed it mightily, and altering his grip, swung it about him by the heels, as if on the point of carrying his threat into effect. Then in the midst of a turmoil of cuffs and bites and scratches, Black Leo sat himself down on the tufted juniper and broom roots, took the captured object between his knees, and exhibited further reasons for submission. The scratching and lashing extremities ceased their action. A faint whimpering was heard.

"I will be good—I will, father!" gasped the object between Black Leo's knees.

"Mind," threatened the man of Pierre-à-Feu, "let me see you trying to run away again—I will finish you if you do. Where have you been, imp?"

The Wild Cat snuffled a little—the dry snuffle of a child knuckling his eyes, not contrition, but to excite sympathy. He doubtless expected the Pastor to intercede for him. But David knew better than to interfere in such family matters.

"Answer me," muttered Black Leo, "what mischief have you been up to? You will end on the gallows one of these days!"

At which David smiled unseen, for with the single

exception of himself, that was the fate which every man and woman for twenty miles round expected and hoped for Leo himself.

After having enforced his moral lesson by more severe shakes, the justicer again commanded his prodigal son to say what he had been doing.

"Nothing!" sobbed the Wild Cat; "I drove in the sheep for Jean Heller—and he gave me a piece of money——"

"White?" demanded his father.

"Brown!" affirmed the son.

Black Leo, without going through the formality of asking the Wild Cat to deliver up the money, instantly searched him from head to foot—not a difficult matter, seeing that a shirt of doubtful hue and a pair of ragged knee-breeches composed his wardrobe. It was not to be expected that the Wild Cat would be so ill-advised as to trust such a treasure to the doubtful state of his pockets. So the man of Pierre-à-Feu did not even trouble himself to look there. He examined, instead, the seams with much care; he pricked his finger on a concealed needle-and-thread, and finally discovered something hard in the band of his son's trousers. Leo evidently considered that he was now in the good way, for he laid the Wild Cat carefully down among the broom, and kept him there with his knee while he opened out a clasp knife, at sight of which the imp ceased struggling and lay quite still. Leo pricked the seam, slit some stitches, and brought to light a series of white stones and rock crystals. These he threw away, though the Wild Cat uttered roars of grief and rage at his loss.

Black Leo did not waste time in requiring information from his son as to the whereabouts of the "white piece." He merely inserted his finger and thumb into the boy's mouth, took hold of his tongue, and with all the force of the other palm delivered a resounding slap between his shoulders. The Wild Cat gave vent to something between a cough and a bark, and with it came the coin. It fell into his father's hand.

Leo stood erect, taking no further notice of his offspring, who now free from his actions, proceeded to strike and beat and kick his father's legs as high as he could reach.

The outlaw made a brief examination of the coin, and then, suddenly bending, he scooped up the Wild Cat again.

"You lie, you imp," he cried, "you never got that coin from Jean Heller. You never drove home his sheep. This is a gold piece. Now I will teach you what it is to tell lies to your father." And he began to undo his waist-belt.

But David felt that it was now high time to intervene. They were not so very far from the house of Villars Chaumont, and the cries of the chastised Wild Cat might alarm those within. They were now on an investigation which needed all care and secrecy if his sister were to be traced. Any disagreement of his chosen instruments might seriously disarrange his plans.

"Give me the boy," said he; "perhaps he will speak for me."

And he reached out a hand which he placed on the arm of the imp.

"Bid father put on his belt then," whimpered the Wild Cat, "and if that piece is gold, as he says, tell him that I am to have a white piece out of it! I worked for it!"

"If you are sage," said David gently, as he installed the urchin between his knees, "if you tell us all you have seen exactly, I will give you a silver coin for yourself, one which your father will not take away. You promise, Leo!"

The father, who had finished buckling on again his leathern court of appeal, grunted a reluctant renunciation.

"Who gave you the money?" said David—"not Jean Heller? For if so, you must take it back tomorrow."

At this Black Leo snorted scornfully.

"Where is the white piece?" said the imp. "Give it me now!"

David Alix felt in his pockets for a franc, which he put into the boy's hand. The imp could not see it, but in a moment he had measured it with his fingernail, weighed it in his palm, and assured himself of its genuineness with his teeth.

"Twenty good sous!" he said; "I will tell everything!"

And there in the darkness of that glade, where under the tumbled earth and boulders lay Breslin the smith, slain in the moment of his crime, the Wild Cat told his tale.

It was a lie—yes, that about bringing home the sheep of Jean Heller. But all the same not quite a lie, for he had driven them afield. *That* was no lie.

He had promised to look after them all day while Jean was at the hay down in the *bassins*. But the time had seemed endless. He had wearied long before the afternoon, and had gone down to Madame's at Chaumont, which he knew to be "a good meat-house."

But there it was his misfortune to arrive too late. The diners were already coming out, and the hungry Wild Cat, crouching among the hot rocks, was prompted to throw stones at them when he saw them luxuriously stretching themselves in the shade and beginning to pick their teeth.

Disgusted with this, the imp skirted the house, entered the orchard, ascended a tree, and there discovered a dark purple regalement of over-ripe cherries high among the branches, which, however, he had had to dispute with a colony of wasps. But, the sharpness of his hunger once blunted, he had descended, and climbing a ladder which was set against the garden wall he sat down on the topmost bar to observe, ready to drop over into safety at any moment.

Presently he heard a voice call out, "Little boy! Little boy!" At once the Wild Cat, by instinct and training suspicious of kindness, leaped on the top of the wall and made ready to jump. But while perilously poised there he looked back and saw "only a big girl" beckoning to him. She did not look very terrible, nor even angry. She did not tell him to go away, but that might only be her cunning, in order to get hold of him. He was far too wary a Wild Cat for that. Trust him.

But the big girl showed him a coin—yes, the one

he had! (here the imp pointed vindictively at his father in the darkness). And she said that she would give it him if he would bring the ladder on which he was sitting, and place it against the window-sill out of which she was leaning. It was a risk, of course, for after all she might not give him the money.

"Drop the money down when you are in the middle," the imp had said, "or I will pull away the ladder from under you!" They would not deceive the Wild Cat—ah, no!

Secretly, however, he was not much afraid. He understood that the girl had been locked up and wished to get out to play. *His* father often tied him to a ring in the wall when he went away. And anyway, he could get the better of any girl! Of course!

What came after that? Oh, nothing much. He helped the big girl over the wall, and put the ladder back where he had found it. Then he too dropped outside. The girl was crying. (Here the imp expressed a natural disdain for the sex; he wouldn't, not he!) But when she was in the wood, she did not want to play. She wanted instead to go and find someone who lived across the *bassins*, and she actually sat down in despair because she did not know how to get across the water without being seen.

It was fun. The Wild Cat had never been so near a big girl before, but he was not frightened of anything that cried. Nobody would. But he could and would show her how to get across the lake. She might give him some more money. She did not

know—it was hardly to be believed that she was not shamming. But she was not.

So the Wild Cat, pleased to exhibit his cunning, showed her how to cover head and shoulders with a green bough, and creep along the bottom of one of the ravines which comes out opposite Fraichot. When at last they came in sight of the lake, he left her for a little, while he went and stole a skiff. It was the after-dinner hour, when everybody was asleep, and he had often stolen blind old Karl's boat anyway, when he was sitting on the log in front of his door looking at him. Even this was nothing to what he, the aforesaid imp, could do.

The big girl crouched down in the stern and he threw a branch or two of green alder over her, with some flowers of the "teol" tree, which makes such good tisane. Any one would think that old Karl had lent him the skiff to go over to the French side to sell these, for they have no "teol" for tisane over there. Was he not clever, this imp?

He rowed, and in time they came to the other side, but instead of going to Duret's or Jacquine's, she turned up towards the old house of Collines, where no one had lived since the Germans burnt it down; he told the big girl that there was a fine fête at Chaillaxon, but she did not heed him. After all, it was not his business. He could go alone if he liked; he had the money safe. But he wanted to see what she was going to do. So he followed after, though he did not let her see him, however often she turned round to look.

She went to the Collines, and there she had to

wander about because, of course, she found nobody. But he, the imp, knew that La Grande Flore, who was mad, was hiding in the wood of Creusot, where there is a quarry, very big and old. He went and told her, first casting down a stone from the quarry's edge to warn her not to shoot. He went and told her, for it is not good at all times to go near La Grande Flore.

However she came out, and he called down to her from the edge that a great girl from Chaumont had come to see her; she was wandering about Les Collines looking for her. Upon which La Grande Flore took a gun she had hid somewhere, and went across the country, stalking with great strides like a man. Then the Wild Cat was sorry that he had brought the big girl from Chaumont. It would have been better for her, thought the imp, to have waited till her mother unchained her from the ring in the wall, rather than that she should face La Grande Flore with that gun in her hand.

But when the big girl from Chaumont saw La Grande Flore she ran to her, and cast her arms about her neck. More wonderful still, La Grande Flore did the like, having, however, first laid down her gun.

No, there was nothing else. It had not turned out as the Wild Cat had expected. They were rather stupid, these two. After that La Grande Flore and the big girl whom he had taken across the *bassins* in old Karl's boat, went away together, he did not know where. They never looked back at him nor gave him anything to eat, but he had gone down into the quarry

of Creusot to the lair of La Grande Flore, where he had found part of a ham, some bread, sausage, and wine. These things were not now in the great quarry in the wood of Creusot.

This was all he knew. The Wild Cat had told his tale truly. Also he had a twenty-sous which his father was not to take from him. The Pastor would curse him if he did. And now he was very tired. He wanted to go home and sleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SEARCH

WHEN it was light David hastily scribbled a note to his mother at Villars Chaumont, as far as possible relieving her mind about Noélie. Black Leo promised that this should reach her speedily and safely. It was impossible for him to cross the *bassins* in daylight, for that district was swarming with his personal enemies. But there was no reason why the Wild Cat should not go with David Alix.

This proposition naturally caused the Pastor to look a little blank. He did not doubt the imp's abilities, but—it was a sight calculated to arouse attention, a frock-coated Protestant pastor, soft-hatted and white-tied, accompanied by an urchin, dark-skinned as any gipsy, ragged and weather-beaten as a last year's scarecrow.

The boy was quick to note David's hesitation, and said roguishly, "You will have plenty of time to teach me the catechism!"

The Pastor made no answer, so the boy, with a swift leap aside from the path, was lost in the foliage. David thought at first that he had been offended, but from above his head there came the cry of an

owl three times uttered. In a few seconds the cry was repeated lower down the ravine, and yet a third time immediately behind him. Then, almost without a rustle, there in his old place stood the Wild Cat of Pierre-à-Feu, a little breathless, but otherwise unmoved.

"He is right," said the outlaw, "he will not be in your way—you will find him of use. He is a wizard's own brat, but—he will do your bidding, not for the first time."

So David's guardian angel had been found. He was somehow vaguely disappointed. The guardian angel had decidedly lien among the pots, and would be none the worse for much water, some soap, and a scrubbing.

"No matter," he thought, "so long as he helps me to find Noélie!"

As soon as the Man of Pierre-à-Feu had gone off with the note to Madame David the Elder, the Wild Cat and the Pastor started out towards the mouth of the Fraichot ravine. David went to the cottage of old Karl to ask for the loan of his boat in which to cross the lake. It was readily given. Not only so, but the old man insisted upon the Pastor sharing his breakfast of bread sopped in *café-au-lait.* Afterwards he made up a little parcel which he forced upon David, as being necessary for the wild country into which he was going. This David Alix gladly accepted, for he remembered his small ally with the vigorous appetite, for whom it was necessary to provide rations.

They crossed the lake while it was still early—

indeed, before another boat was to be seen on its deep green waters. On the French side they left old Karl's skiff in charge of a boatman who was a member of David's flock, and set out to follow Noélie's route towards Les Collines. The farm was a blackened desolation, and David left it gladly behind to cross the ridge to the quarry in which, with the instinct of a wild beast which plans revenge, La Grande Flore had hid herself.

Here they found many marks of habitation, but the rude cave had evidently remained without occupant since the abrupt departure of the day before and the after-raid which the Wild Cat had executed. The imp could only vaguely indicate the direction which Noélie and La Grande Flore had taken. This was their first check.

Of one thing he was certain—that it led in the direction of Vercel, which pointed clearly to the fact that Noélie was making for Besançon. When once the lake shore began to drop beneath them, and they penetrated the wild ridges, David clapped his hands and called his satellite to approach more closely. He gave him part of the packet of provender which old Karl had put up for his minister. The Wild Cat divided it carefully into two parts, of which he devoured one in a dozen gulps, and then stowed away the other in some recess of his scanty garments. After this sealing of amity in bread and salt, the two kept close together.

But at the first sign of a shepherd or other unknown, the imp would vanish. No matter if they were crossing what seemed a perfectly bare slope, or

ascending a crumbling bank of the shaly sandstone of the district, a single scrambling roll or a quick spring, and lo, the imp was blotted out, so that David himself could hardly guess his whereabouts! But, though this perturbed the Pastor a little at first, he soon became habituated to the wonder, and pursued his way as tranquilly as might be, meditating on the reasons which could have induced Noélie to leave her home.

The explanations which Madame had given him were not at all satisfying to his mind. He could well enough believe that his half-sister might have felt more than an ordinary sympathy for the stalwart Chaplain, especially when tending him as a wounded man. But he was quite nonplussed by his mother's attitude.

Certainly, Noélie would be rich one day. But in that respect Hermann Falk was quite a match for her. He had at first thought that it might be owing to the strong hatred of all Germans which his mother had professed, that hatred which for some time had made of her house at Chaumont a place of illegal arms. But she had showed a constant and even devoted care of the sick man during the week of Noélie's forced imprisonment, taking upon herself all the duties of a nurse and companion. David understood Noélie's impulse to leave the house. She had, he knew, inherited a part of her mother's quick temper, but David counted much on the fact that her angers rarely lasted long or had any serious result.

He assured himself that from the first Noélie had

had some definite object in wishing to visit Les Collines. And reflection left him almost certain that that object was to find her friend, La Petite Flore, late officer in the Laroche corps of *franc-tireurs.*

While David was meditating thus, his scout kept an excellent advance-guard, sometimes on one side of the path, sometimes on another, but always unseen. He was certain to be recalled as soon as he wandered, by the hooting of the guardian angel, which did not cease till he was once more on the straight path.

They came to the entrance of Vercel about noon, but though David made inquiry everywhere in the town, he could not discover anything of the fugitives. He made the tour of the schools, thinking it possible that La Petite Flore, upon the dispersion of her corps, had taken again to her ancient profession. But neither there nor among the scattered Protestants of the bourg could he discover that Noélie had been seen. In Vercel La Petite Flore was wholly unknown.

David resolved to go on to Besançon. He therefore purchased a supply of food, and set out without losing a moment. At the first turn of the road, after clearing the village, David heard the war-whoop of his guardian angel upon the heights. Evidently the imp, by his wild gestures, had made some important discovery. Accordingly the Pastor left the road and mounted up to where the Wild Cat was bobbing up and down in wild excitement.

He was so excited that at first he could not speak, but seizing David by the hand, led him to a well-

hidden niche screened by reeds and long grass. Here lay a gun which the imp declared to be that of La Grand Flore, and beside it, carefully rolled in brown paper, were the hat and dress which Noélie had ordinarily worn at Chaumont. These were wrapped in tissue paper and stouter envelopes, all of which bore the name and address of a shop in Vercel.

"Noélie," thought David sadly, "has taken off the dress in which she escaped, and has bought a ready-made disguise, lest my mother should put a description of her in the newspapers!"

The case was more serious than he had imagined. It was evident that the girl had no intention of returning home, and the thought saddened him.

All the while the Wild Cat was a prey to great and growing excitement. He almost constrained David to cower down beside him. And the Pastor unwillingly complying, the two pursuers crouched in the brushwood a score of yards from the hiding-place of the parcel and the gun, which had been hastily restored to their places.

Through a peephole which the Wild Cat made with his small brown hand, David could see La Grande Flore approaching, making straight across the fields towards the *cache*. His instinct was to rise and confront her. But the little brown hand touched him beseechingly.

"You will spoil it," whispered the Wild Cat, with glowing eyes; "I was sure she would come—because of the gun. But she will take the other things also. We have only to keep out of sight and follow her."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE POST-OFFICE OF VERCEL-ADAM

LA GRANDE FLORE opened out the *cache* in the most careless manner in the world—indeed, as if she had been still in her farm kitchen at Les Collines. She kicked aside the brushwood and tall grass which the Wild Cat had treated so gingerly and replaced with such care. The gun was there, and she snatched it up eagerly. But as she gathered up the rolls of paper which surrounded Noélie's hat and garments, a shade of suspicion seemed to disturb her. These wrappings had, in fact, been restored very summarily by the inexpert hands of David Alix.

La Grande Flore however, evidently decided within herself that since the articles were safe and sound, there was no need to inquire any farther. She thrust the parcels under one arm, flung the gun over her shoulder, and set off with her usual long, swinging stride in the direction from which she had come.

David, tired of his crouching position and not a little ashamed of thus acting the spy, even for Noélie's sake, stood erect. He might easily have been seen, but the old woman never looked round.

"Take care, please keep out of sight," the imp

pleaded, seeing success very near; "if she sees you, she will not go near where the big girl is hidden."

This was so true that David consented to follow carefully the edge of a wood that stretched almost from the town of Vercel to a tiny white village which could be seen on a rising ground a mile and a half away. It so chanced that David had no co-religionaries there, so that he had never entered it. But he knew that it was called Adam, or more properly Vercel-Adam.

To this place the tall old woman was very evidently making her way. As before, she disregarded all trespass laws, and marched across fields where stray peasants were labouring to repair the ravages of the bad season and the scourge of war. But in the newly regained peace the land from verge to verge took on a quiet of a country Sabbath morn in summer-time, when even the bees hum a psalm and the bleating of distant flocks reaches the ear like a far-heard Magnificat.

The old woman went her way, proudly erect among the few poor workers bent double over their field labour. Some of them glanced sideways, and once a man erected himself as if he had half a mind to remonstrate. But the gun over the shoulder of La Grande Flore and her look of wild energy daunted him. The peasants of the Franche Comté had been thoroughly broken to trespassers during the bygone year. So this one passed on her way unrebuked. David Alix, piloted by the Wild Cat with consummate skill, not only could not be seen by their quarry, but was not even observed by the workers in the fields.

Yet when they reached the narrow street of Vercel-Adam, at that time composed of twenty or thirty houses, sheltering not more than a hundred souls, they were already close upon her heels. The Wild Cat laid a restraining hand upon David's black sleeve.

"Slowly," he whispered, "it is now that she will look round." And indeed the instinct of the little rock-dweller of Pierre-à-Feu proved correct. La Grande Flore halted, faced about, and scanned the little vacant streets, the road running away down to the town in the hollow, its white houses shining through the ground haze, and the tall detached chimneys telling of rude winters and the strife of turbulent winds.

But the nervous restraining clutch upon his coat had kept David out of the way of mischief. La Grande Flore, satisfied, pushed open the door of a little house and entered, closing it behind her.

The imp fairly danced for joy.

"She is there—the big girl I rowed across the *bassins* to Fraichot. You will give me other twenty sous if I have led you well. And you will not tell my father. I will spend it all at the fair of Chaillaxon!"

David promised the additional franc in good silver, if it were indeed as he said, and with a beating heart started to follow. But for the last time the imp intervened with a caution.

"Go round the village," he said; "do you not see you have to pass the window if you walk straight up the street? *She* might get time to hide. But there are no windows on the other side of the door. You will be upon them before a cat can jump!"

"Even a Wild Cat," said David, smiling. All the same he did as he was bid. They took a long détour behind the little cluster of village houses. Then they returned quietly down the road from the direction opposite to that in which La Grande Flore had entered the village. From a little square sign David noted that the house served the village of Adam as a post-office. The gilt eagle of the Empire had been removed, but it had left its outline quite clear on the weatherbeaten panel on which the Republic had rudely daubed its motto of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity."

He had not time to observe more. His hand was on the latch. He opened and entered. A girl in black, seated at a desk, rose quietly, and came forward to the little counter. She was tall and simply dressed. It was La Petite Flore herself. She did not seem alarmed or even surprised by his appearance, but stood waiting for him to speak.

While they thus stood confronting one another, a door opened at the back, and there in the opening stood Noélie herself, in plain black dress, with the white collar and apron of a nurse. Even the *brassard* of Geneva was on her arm.

At sight of David she swayed and seemed about to fall, so greatly was she taken by surprise. Nevertheless she carefully set down the tray she had been carrying before coming forward to meet her brother.

"Noélie!" he said, and held out his hands smilingly. He could not bear that she should be strange with him. She stood there and laid her head against his breast.

"You are not angry with me, David?" she said

softly, without, however, venturing to meet his eye directly.

"Have I ever been angry with you, Noélie?" he said, laying his hand on her head. "But did you think of the trouble you left behind you?"

A sudden light flamed in the girl's eyes.

"David," she said, "I love you well, and I would not give you a bad thought of me if I could help it. But I cannot go back—there——"

"Is it because of anything our mother has said or done?" David continued gently.

"That—yes, that made me angry. I own it. It was unbearable. More, it was—ignoble——"

"Hush, Noélie," he murmured; "remember that you are speaking of your mother—*my* mother!"

"Ah, you do not know!" she cried, flinging out her arms against his breast.

"I do not know, but I can guess," said David gravely.

"No, no," she insisted, "you are a man, and such a man as no one else. You cannot know. You cannot guess."

David was silent. He knew that the time for the wise word had not yet come. It was the truest wisdom to let the storm blow over.

"Besides," Noélie continued, as if she could not bear a silence, "I was not allowed to be of the least use at home. When I did try to do something really useful, I was locked up like a thief—*I*, a woman grown. Then, happily, I heard that there was work waiting for me here that was worth the doing—which no one but I had a right to do!"

She paused and looked at him, firmly and a little defiantly.

"If you have come to take me back to—to that place, I tell you I shall not go! I love you, my David, but I cannot go back!"

"And what is this work which has more claims upon you than obedience to your mother, and love for our ancient comradeship?"

Noélie looked a question at La Petite Flore. The postmistress had gone back to her desk, as if unwilling to intrude between these two kinsfolk, yet she remained ready to intervene in case of need. Flore nodded and pointed towards the inner door.

Then Noélie took David's hand and, without the least preliminary of explanation, led him down a long passage into a sort of pavilion built out in the garden. Within, a man was lying on the bed, his head wrapped in white bandages, his face deadly pale and beaded with perspiration. The man's eyes were shut and his breathing came from his lips with an uncertain whistling sound which sometimes hardened sharply into a rattle.

David did not at first recognise the sick man. The untrimmed black beard that fringed his face acted as a disguise. But gradually certainty came. The man before him was no other than Ludovic Villars, who with his band had attacked the east wing of Chaumont and attempted to kill Noélie herself.

The eyes of Noélie had been keenly exploring his face. She nodded.

"Yes, it is true," she said. "It is he, my brother!"

At the sound of her voice the wounded man

opened his eyes, and without taking the least notice of David Alix, or seeming even to see him, he reached out a hand to Noélie.

A quick pang of jealousy ran through the heart of the Pastor, for which in a calmer moment he would have reproached himself.

"Am not I your brother of a lifetime?" he asked. "Why did you leave us all without a word to come here to this stranger?"

"Because he has the greater need of me. He is my brother, and asked for me. A messenger brought me a letter written by La Petite out yonder. I let down a thread and pulled it up. Ludovic's heart is changed. He has suffered greatly. He is wounded and near to death. Can I leave him alone?"

A suspicion that the gravity of the wound had been exaggerated in order to draw Noélie from her home traversed the mind of David, but only to be dispelled.

"He was shot through the lungs by some of his old band," she said. "They wanted him to join them again and he would not. So they tried to kill him, but La Petite Flore, with her mother and the Widow Breslin, carried him here."

David did not speak for a full minute. The wounded man watched him with a kind of dazed indifference, which, however, quite lacked the former hostility. He scarcely seemed to recognise any one except Noélie. His eyes followed her about the room with the persistence of those of a painting on the wall. There was a constant yearning for expression in them—the desire of a grateful dog for the power of human speech.

"He cannot speak to us," Noélie explained. "He has never spoken. Some of the bullets cannot be extracted at present. But the doctor from Vercel says that his speech may return. He was an hospital surgeon during the war and has seen such cases."

David went closer to the bed. At sight of his tall, dark figure the eyes flickered up to the Pastor's face. A shudder seemed to pass from head to foot of the wounded man. He looked wildly about for Noélie, who came hastily to his side.

She bent over him. "Brother Ludovic," she said, "this is my other brother David come to see you."

Then she took David's hand and brought it near to that of her patient, which she already held.

"Brothers of mine," she said, looking from David to Ludovic and back again, "you have been too long nothing to each other. Be brothers one to the other, because I, Noélie, am your sister"

'BE BROTHERS ONE TO THE OTHER, BECAUSE I, NOELIE, AM YOUR SISTER.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ADVENTURES OF A TRAITOR

IT was by the good offices of Valreas that Ludovic Villars escaped from the five questions which Monsieur Macé, Chief Commissary of Police to the Government at Versailles, put to all suspects brought before him.

"Your name? Your age? Where were you born? Your profession? What induced you to take up arms with the insurgents?"

One afternoon early in June, when Versailles was in a greater hubbub than usual owing to the arrival of some thousands of new prisoners from Paris, Mr. Judge of Instruction Valreas accidentally spilt ink on his second-best official robe, cleaned it hastily with a little benzine, and hung it out of the window of his bureau.

Two seconds after Ludovic Villars saw it, laid down his pen, and rising without haste, put on his street-coat, informed his superior that, owing to a sudden indisposition, he would not be back that day, and passed out of the town, taking the route to the south-east which leads by Orleans to Dijon. This, he hoped, would keep him clear of the occupied provinces.

He had learned many things, and unlearned more, during these anxious weeks, when he did the work of a Government against which he had levied open war. It afforded matter for thought to be obliged to live with an eye on the window of a certain public office opposite, his ear picking out the steps on the stair, and his whole being pulled up with a cruel jerk every time that the door opened.

As he passed through the street, he saw the fickle, well-dressed mob of ex-Parisians, submissive and craven in their own city on the day of the victory of the National Guards, but now trampling each other down in their eagerness to strike at defenceless prisoners.

Above all, he could hear the constant rattle of the firing-parties on the plateau of the camp of Sartory. In the angle of the Prefecture, too, the *peloton* of execution did its deadly work. For some time he could hardly make his way, even when furnished with passwords and papers witnessing that he was an official in the service of the Government at Versailles. He was called upon to prove his identity at every post, and it was not till he reached the forest of Fontainebleau, a little to the east of Melun, that he began to breathe freely.

He began to count himself fortunate when he managed to hide on a train of empty waggons by which supplies had been brought from the south for the armies presently circling Paris.

This brought him almost to Dijon. But while passing through the rocky, much-tunnelled region of the Côte d'Or, Ludovic, sitting up on the little bundle

of hay he had painfully collected for a pillow, noticed on a platform as the train rattled past a couple of soldiers wearing Bavarian helmets.

He had been long drowsy, but he woke with a start, sleep effectually banished in a moment.

"Van der Tann's men!" Ah, he knew them of old, and they knew him. They would make short work of the ex-captain of sharpshooters, Ludovic Villars. He was also within reach of the telegraph from Versailles, and, knowing as he did the determination of the Government, he had short shrift to expect if he were set upon his trial for his leadership of the Reds at Lyons.

So when next the train of empties was shunted into a siding to let the more pressing passenger traffic go by, he resolved to drop off, and chance it across country.

This he succeeded in doing, still almost within sight of Dijon, and he counted himself lucky, when from the deep woods he heard the shrill German bugles scream and saw the tossing black and white of the Uhlan pennons scouring the roads in search of such as he.

Ludovic Villars waited in a thicket till nightfall, and then struck eastwards towards Besançon and the Doubs. There he would be fairly safe. His mind, distracted between so many perils, began to firm itself a little. Yet it is strange that he did not see the most urgent and pressing danger that threatened him.

But, with a lift here from a local freight train, and a night's lodging there with a forest guard, he succeeded in passing Besançon. He breathed still freer.

It seemed to him that his troubles were over when the high-piled citadel sank into the plain. With the agony of fear that had passed over his own mind, there had come a new pity for others which he had never known before. Now he felt no anger against his father's widow. The thought that he had, not so long ago, threatened, if not attempted, the life of his sister, his father's daughter, preyed constantly upon his mind. In the new wisdom that had come to him by disillusionment and the loss of his political ideals, he desired nothing better than to be reconciled with those against whom he had lately plotted death.

He looked on the woods and fields through which he passed with fresh eyes, because with the bitterness of death the old anger had passed out of his life.

In time he reached the country of the Doubs. He lodged a night at Pierrefontaine, with the widow of that Breslin who had been his most faithful supporter in the band. To her he confided the Odyssey of his journey to Paris, the rebuffs he had met with, his capture by the Germans, his life at Versailles, and last of all, the price that was set on his head by the Government.

In a way he had not chosen his confidante ill. The Widow Breslin would certainly not betray him to the existing or any other Government. But in all innocence she did what was worse. She hastened to spread the news of his return among the scattered members of the band of which he had been the captain. She looked to him to avenge his servant, her husband.

She knew that Breslin had gone forth, meaning

to carry out the plans of his absent chief, when he disappeared so mysteriously, and she remained convinced that he had met his death somewhere in the neighbourhood of Chaumont. But now the captain would make all clear.

So the band of the Avengers reassembled, greatly thinned in numbers, but made up almost exclusively of the most desperate plunderers, men whom no Government would pardon—vowed to the hemp and the bullet. They welcomed their ancient chief, swore to stand by him against all Governments, and in spite of his reluctance, related each his own crimes—a full tale of misdeeds, plunderings, and assassinations which it sickened him to listen to.

Then they asked Ludovic concerning his plans, and when at last the great assault upon Villars Chaumont was to be made. The ex-functionary of Versailles hesitated. He must have time to think. There was no hurry. He would meet them in two days in the forest of Vercel-Adam.

The band withdrew to their hiding-place, leaving their returned chief with the Widow Breslin. They wanted to consult. Some of his declarations appeared feeble ; all were unsatisfactory. He had not come back from Versailles the same man he had gone thither. And who knew but that his return was only a feint to make them confess, and so put their heads within the reach of the law ? They had confessed, and now, doubtless, he was on the point of betraying them.

At this some of the fiercer spirits started to their feet. They would seek him instantly and settle the business. But the more cautious advised keeping

him under observation till the hour of the meeting in the wood of Vercel. Then they would give him a choice which would settle matters—one way or the other. A watch was accordingly set over Ludovic's movements, and the house of the Widow Breslin surrounded by vigilant sentinels.

Only one thing saved his life. Doubtless if Ludovic Villars, now tardily repentant and desirous to break with his past, ventured into the wood of Vercel, he would never come out alive. But the Widow Breslin remembered how, in all cases when the band threatened mutiny, or when the inevitable quarrels common to such loose and lawless organisations occurred, her dead husband had always stood up manfully for his captain. It had, indeed, been his sole merit, and that not a domestic one. But now his widow resolved to save the captain, in the place of the dead lieutenant who could do no more for him.

She could only do so by betraying the band which had forsaken her husband. For she held that if the servant had been allowed to go to Paris with the master, he would have returned with him also. Besides, she had heard whisperings. She was in daily and nightly intercourse with the womenkind of the outlaws. An inkling of their deadly intentions reached her. Now the Widow Breslin was cleverer than her husband had been. She sent an urgent message by the ordinary post to Besançon informing the governor of the fortress where and when he would capture the whole of the band which had so long terrorised the neighbourhood of the *bassins* and plateaux of the Doubs.

In person she carried word to the leaders of the company that their captain was too fatigued to come to the wood of Vercel at the time first arranged, but that he had sent her to say that on the fourth night he would lead them against the house of Villars Chaumont. Meantime they were to hold themselves in readiness.

But the suspicions of the band were not allayed. The sentinels on the movements of Ludovic were not recalled. And it was only when, on the evening appointed, Ludovic came slowly out, leaning on the arm of the Widow Breslin, and the pair took the road to the wood of Vercel, that the spies fell back and the whole band reunited to wait for their captain at the trysting-place.

But while they held a council and arranged details, the troops, engineers and two companies of infantry with a *mitrailleuse*, drew cautiously inward and posted themselves about the wood. Some of the spies, hastening to warn their comrades of the approach of the captain, stumbled on a dozen of these watchers, and the sharp fusillade which followed warned the band that it had been betrayed.

It was useless to resist. They were taken where they sat—all but four bold spirits who resolved before dying to revenge themselves on the triple traitor. They made a rush in open order at the regulars and two got away. Guided by one of the spies, whom they picked up outside the line of soldiers, they rushed upon Ludovic, who, astonished by the sudden crash of firing, stood motionless on a little hill. His nerves were not what they had been. The anxiety of Versailles

had weakened him. The whirring shriek of the machine-gun which was firing after the fugitives seemed utterly to paralyse him. He was not afraid, but as in a dream, his limbs refused their office. He saw men running and firing without knowing why. Then suddenly he felt himself struck in several places as if with a hammer. At first he felt no pain.

It was never quite certain whether all Ludovic's wounds were given him by his own men, or whether he accidentally received a share of the bullets from the soldiers firing after the escaped bandits.

The widow who, though she stood by him, escaped unhurt, declared that one of the fugitives had fired twice at him and the other once before they fell. It is likely, however, that Ludovic was also wounded by the *mitrailleuse* fire from the wood upon these last remaining fugitives.

The band was now completely broken up. The prisoners were promptly removed to Besançon, where in due time they were either executed out of hand or deported to New Caledonia.

The same night, with great care and secrecy, Ludovic Villars was transferred to the house of La Petite Flore, the recently appointed Receiver of the Post-Office at the hamlet of Vercel-Adam. The next morning Flore wrote to her friend, Noélie, in her mother's house at Villars Chaumont, a letter which arrived there at a critical moment and was the cause of many things. What was the young girl's reply to the appeal has already been told.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MIDNIGHT CONFESSION

DAVID was disingenuous for the first time in his life. He wrote a letter to his mother, telling her of his finding of Noélie and of her safety. But he neither sent it by post nor mentioned the name of the place where Noélie was nursing the sick man, her brother.

The letter was committed to the imp with strict directions to deliver it only into the hands of Madame at Villars Chaumont. Whereupon he was immediately to take his departure without waiting to be questioned.

The boy looked up shrewdly at David, and said, "What would it matter if she *did* ask me questions?"

But David was too conscientious to encourage the proposed exhibition of gratuitous lying. He sent the imp on his way with another franc concealed about his person, and a warning that if he lingered at the fair of Chaillaxon, his father should be told of his hoard.

At this the boy snapped his fingers and laughed.

"It will be as good as twenty sous to see Madame's face," he said, "and besides, I shall not take the money to Pierre-à-Feu—oh, no. Not again."

And with a skip and playful flourish of a brown toe as high as his head, the Wild Cat was gone upon his errand. But as an interesting document illustrating the progress of duplicity in even the simplest natures, the letter David Alix wrote to his mother deserves to be preserved. It ran as here followeth:

"THURSDAY.

"DEAR MOTHER,—I have found Noélie, and I write at once to set your mind at rest about her. I have had a long and difficult search in which I would never have succeeded but for the blessing of God, and His assistance in the choice of instruments.

"Noélie is quite safe in the house of excellent people. She is still in a highly excited state, but the duty which she has undertaken is a noble and Christian one. She received, as now appears, while still at home, a letter informing her that her half-brother, Ludovic Villars, was lying in this place, sick unto death, suffering from many wounds, and asking urgently to see her. She instantly left home, and came hither with all speed to nurse her relative, and, I hope, to guide back to divine love and forgiveness a sorely stricken soul.

"I pray you, dear mother, not to bear hardly upon our little girl. Impulse may sometimes appear to rule her, it is true. But if you and I look within we may well find that Noélie is far from singular in that. Your affectionate son,

"DAVID ALIX."

This epistle, with its reticences and its home truths, both equally carefully veiled according to David's thought, pleased him not a little. Nothing is more agreeable to a candid mind than a little occasional innocent guile, and on the strength of this letter to his mother David was ready to set up as a Machiavel.

Certainly it contained nothing which could reveal the place of Noélie's refuge. This appeared to all to be indispensable. For the girl, though full of tenderness

for David, shrank greatly from meeting her mother—at least till she knew how matters stood at Villars Chaumont.

That night David remained at the pavilion in the rear of the post-office. He had resolved to watch by the wounded man in order that Noélie might get the rest of which she was in need. La Petite Flore was all day about her business as Postal Receiver, and though entirely willing, could not be expected to watch at night also, though she might be able to take some charge during the day while Noélie rested. As for La Grande, she had betaken herself back to her cavern in the quarry at the back of Les Collines with her gun and a new stock of provisions.

Noélie was unwilling to leave her brother even for a few hours ; but David and La Petite Flore insisted. They were seconded by the healthy drowsiness of youth, a long journey, and the many varied emotions of the last days. In a little the tall young postmistress-official came down with the news that Noélie was sleeping the dreamless sleep of the utterly tired out.

David, with a shaded lamp and a book, settled himself to pass the night in the single arm-chair which the hastily installed household possessed. Ludovic, at first restless and feverish, continually tossing and plucking at his bandages, passed sharply into a state of apparent unconsciousness. Nevertheless, once or twice when David raised his head, he caught over the blinding white light of the lamp and the greenish circle of the shade, the eyes of the wounded man fixed upon his.

He rose and went over to the bed on the second

occasion, but returned, saying to himself that he must have been mistaken. Ludovic's eyes were shut, and David could hear the laboured sound of his breathing.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when Ludovic spoke. It was the first time since he had been brought in. His voice was high, clear, effortless, but without the least modulation.

"You are the Pastor," said the voice from the bed; "what are you doing here?"

David rose and went nearer to him.

"You remember," he said, with gentle tact, "Noélie, our sister, brought me in to see you. She made us shake hands. We also are brothers."

"Yes, I remember," said Ludovic, with a little sharpness, "but where is she? Why is she not here?"

"She is fatigued, and I am watching for her while she sleeps."

Ludovic shut his eyes as if he wished to close the interview. David stole softly back to his place by the lamp; but the voice recalled him before he had sat down.

"I suppose you believe in the forgiveness of sins?" the voice went on.

"Through Jesus Christ I do, or I should not be a shepherd of sinful souls," said David, ever glad to declare the faith that was in him.

"You have no doubt that sins can be forgiven—the worst sins?"

"I have no doubt—none of the mercy of God—none of the atonement of Jesus Christ."

The voice of the minister was low but infinitely glad. Something of that believer's joy, expressed chiefly in

the thrill and tremor of the voice, touched the wounded man.

"But have you been near death," he demanded, "as near as I?"

"That I cannot say. I have never suffered from many wounds," said David meekly.

"Oh, the wounds of the body—they are nothing," declared Ludovic, with a strange eagerness of accent. "How did your faith stand, when they had you up against that wall in Mouthe with the German rifles pointing at your breast? Breslin, the smith, told me. He was there and saw."

"Ah, then," said David thoughtfully, "I think I was mostly sorry for the poor folk I was leaving behind me to starve. But I committed them to God to keep."

"And your own soul?" The words were almost hissed upward from the bed. Ludovic made an effort to erect himself on one elbow, but in a moment sank down again with a moan of pain.

"My soul?" said David Alix, "*that* I had committed to Him long ago."

"And you were not afraid?" The tone had become almost menacing now, and David could see the eyes fixed upon him as if to read his very soul. The whites of them had taken on red reflections.

"No," said the Pastor calmly, "I was not afraid to die."

The blazing eyes glowed brighter. There was a long silence between them, and then with a sudden jerk which must have wrung his frame with mortal agony, the wounded man sat upright in his bed, and leaning towards the Pastor, whispered awfully the words:

"I am afraid to die!"

His lips were touched with a little faint froth, and David, as he put his arm about him and gently laid him back on the pillow, feared lest he should pass in his very hands. But Ludovic submitted, and, indeed, turned towards the Pastor like a child who fears the dark.

"Help me to die," he pleaded; "I did not know before that I was a coward. Other sorts of coward I am not. I have fought in the hotness of blood and folly. Death has come near me and left me cold. But at Versailles I had time to think. It was the waiting that did it. If they had shot me out of hand I should not have cared. Perhaps that would have tried your courage also."

"Friend," said David, "I have no courage of my own. Only I know that to him whom Christ upholds death is the least of evils. I have known, and I know, that each time I cross into this disturbed land I take my life in my hand. At any moment, from behind any bush, the ball may leap out upon me, the knife strike me down. But, in the faith of the promises and because of my duty, I have never hesitated."

Ludovic Villars was still a while. He knew that the Pastor spoke truth, and something was moving strongly within him. His eyes beckoned David nearer.

"Come hither," he said, "kneel for me and pray. I cannot pray, but I have a confession to make. I would make it here and now. Little time remains to me. I would confess my sin and be quit of it."

David faltered, uncertain how to act.

"But—you are a Catholic. I am a Protestant pastor of the school of Geneva. I cannot give you absolution for your sins. I have no power. I know that only God, for His Son's sake, can do that. Yet, if you will, I can commend you to Him. He is just and faithful to forgive. This I myself have proven."

"I will confess to you or not at all," said the wounded man firmly.

So David, with a prayer for guidance in this difficult case, kneeled down, while the poor tossed human wreckage, to whom all his learning and all his blatant unbelief had suddenly become useless, whispered the terrible tale of his life. The Pastor did not interrupt him with word or question, but let the flood run to the end.

Then David prayed, and in words which he suggested, the contrite man prayed also. What these words were need not be written down. They were such as a good man might choose and a sinner might use. For this good man knew himself to be even as his brother, save for the grace of God. No self-righteousness divided them. They were only two poor human creatures taking hands in the darkness and helping each other to find the Way—not priest and penitent, but brother and brother.

Ludovic asked pardon of the man he had wronged, for himself, for his family. And after searching long for a formula, David's mind settled substantially upon that of Paul to the outcast sinner of wicked Corinth, "To whom ye forgive anything, I also. For if I forgave anything, I forgave it to that man for your sakes, in the person of Christ."

The Men of the Mountain

"Bless me also in His Name," said the man who had confessed, and desired to make his peace. So the faithful Pastor, after commending this yearning soul to God, finished his mission with the apostolic benediction, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish you in every good word and work. Amen."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LITTLE SCHOOLMISTRESS CALLS UP HER RESERVES

WHEN Madame David the Elder received her son's extremely diplomatic letter she was exceedingly annoyed. So much, indeed, goes without saying. If David had sought carefully for forms of words to annoy his mother, he could hardly have succeeded better. Every sentence, every phrase was an offence to her intelligence, an insult to her perspicacity.

"He takes me for a fool. He writes as to a child, with his word formulas and wise saws. As if I could not see through him. The children Thou gavest me, they have risen up against me."

Madame was in the parlour which she had arranged with her own hands for the Military Chaplain, that in which he read the German and English journals she had sent for from Bâle. Here she arranged flowers every morning before assisting a very shamefaced Dr. Hermann Falk to enter and possess the land.

After she had settled the convalescent near the open window, pulled footstools and curtains this way and that, Madame could keep silence no longer. She

thrust David's letter into his hand, and stood behind him watching as he perused it. Now the Military Chaplain had a manly dislike to meddling with the letters of others on any pretext. He handled the note, therefore, in a distinctly irritated manner. Moreover, if there was one thing that he disliked more than another, it was for any one to breathe into his neck. Both these crimes Madame was committing. The Chaplain was annoyed.

In his most military manner he rapped out sharply, "This news must be an immense relief to you, Madame. It is to me."

The lady stepped back, regarded him truculently for a moment, and then dropped her gaze under the steady eye of the Chaplain.

"Yes, a great relief—naturally," she murmured; "but I always knew that Noélie would do something foolish. She is a girl without stability of character."

"You can guess, then, where she is?"

"Guess," cried Madame, turning herself loose with a vicious laugh; "I *know*, and I am going to confront them. There is a plot against me, I tell you. I have evidence of it. But they cannot deceive me. I shall go and shame them. Her brother, indeed—her murderer, more like."

She was on the point of going out in a blaze when the Military Chaplain called her back.

"Madame," he said, in the customary dry manner of command in which he had addressed her of late, "I am deeply indebted to you for all your kindness, but if I am to continue my convalescence in your house, there must be no quarrelling on my account."

"The quarrel, Herr Military Chaplain, has been wholly because of the ingratitude of my children."

"I cannot believe that of your daughter, Madame. I respect her too deeply. I desire that in this matter you will allow her to do what she considers to be her duty. As for my friend David, I know him better than you do, and I inform you that he is quite incapable either of undutifulness himself or of encouraging it in another."

He bowed slightly and with reserve, almost like one who gives an inferior permission to retire from the presence. And the mistress of Château Villars went as obediently as a soldier of the second class out of the presence of the colonel. She felt no astonishment herself. It was the first time in her life that she had been so commanded, and somehow she was conscious of a strange pleasure in obeying.

The Military Chaplain had adopted this tone with her after many and various essays, and to his delight found that it succeeded perfectly. His stay at Château Villars became once more bearable.

But Madame, when she left the Chaplain alone with his books, his journals, and his pipe, had by no means given up the idea of seeking out Noélie. After all, she was the judge of what was best for her family. She was easy in her mind as to her daughter's safety, and by no means sorry to be relieved of her presence in the house, but still she was more uneasy than she had ventured to reveal to Hermann Falk upon another score. That score was David.

To her mind there could be no doubt where the fugitives were concealed. Accordingly Madame,

dressed in her most imposing costume, drew forth from a deep cupboard her hat of ceremony, of an ancient mushroom shape, much adorned with plumes, and with black ribands which tied under the chin in the fashion of fifteen years before. She had been meaning to visit Bâle or Neuchâtel one of these days to restore her out-of-door wardrobe, that it might vie with her new indoor finery. But in her rustling silks she did not doubt that she would appear sufficiently awful to abase the culprits and their supporters.

So this is why, at eleven o'clock in the morning, while the children of the little school on the heights above Les Pargots were taking their music lesson with doors and windows open on account of the heat, a dark, impressive figure suddenly filled the doorway, and silence like the shadow of some threatening misfortune filled the room, descended upon the desks, hushed all childish song, and shaded the bright face of the little schoolmistress. Nevertheless she advanced to meet her visitor, pointer in hand. She had been teaching a new song, and the notes were difficult to follow upon the blackboard.

"Madame," she began, but faltered. And then after a painful pause, in which the unexpected guest appeared to wither the entire company with the fixity of her stare, she managed to ejaculate, "Madame Villars—what can I do for you?"

Not very strong in words was this little schoolmistress, but her heart was sound enough within. She had been surprised, without a moment to arrange her thoughts, for Madame David the Elder was the last visitor she expected to see at Les Bassettes.

"Will you take a seat?" she ventured, setting the best for her, but Madame refused with an imperious gesture.

"Perhaps Mademoiselle the instructress will come to the door for a few minutes," she pontificated; "the subject upon which I have to consult her is not such as will bear opening out before minds young and innocent."

Alice Brante had not the least idea what it was that the haughty *châtelaine* demanded of her. But she had known her in past days as a benefactress, though never a willing or an affectionate one. And besides, she kept in her heart a certain secret which, innocent as it was, made her pale cheeks glow.

She followed Madame to the door meekly enough, with only a word or two thrown over her shoulder to the children to send them to their slates and copy-books. With a single motion of the hand she erected the senior scholar, a girl, to the position of monitor, with the authority of a regent in her absence.

The little schoolmistress, weak in some things, kept very good discipline *chez elle.*

But somehow, as soon as she passed the threshold, and the wide sunlit landscape opened like a green flame before her, she seemed like a poor little culprit led to justice by this stern official accuser. She felt infinitely young and helpless in that grasp.

They paused with one accord within the porch of the cottage. Behind them the noise of the school had sunk to a drowsy hum. Alice was very wistful and lonely as she stood nervously plucking at a vine tendril, and waiting for the thunder to break.

"You have my daughter Noélie hidden with you," Madame Villars began, towering over the little schoolmistress; "do not deny it. My son has written me a letter from here—I know, though he did not mention the name of the place from which he wrote. So much of shame remained to him even under your blighting influence. Do not answer me, I forbid you! The message was delivered to me by one of your own ragged urchins, who doubtless, according to your orders, fled to escape being questioned. I have come seeking my daughter; and as for my son, whom you have suborned from his sacred duty, I forbid you ever to hold the slightest intercourse with him again."

With what astonishment the little schoolmistress heard this strange harangue may be imagined. Madame must have gone out of her mind. So astonished was she that it is hardly to be wondered at that the lady took her amazement for an additional proof of guilt.

"There!" she cried triumphantly, "you are dumbfounded. You cannot answer; guilt is written on your face. Let me see my daughter; where is my son? I *will* know what has been going on here? If I have to call upon the law of the land, I shall find out. I will rescue them out of your designing hands. Oh, it is useless to deny. I have suspected it long; I know it now. Ever since my husband, more clear-sighted than I, turned you out of our house, so that you should not corrupt our children, you have been planning revenge. And now, with your airs of Saint Nitouche, your wiles of hypocritical meekness, you

would play upon his simplicity—the weakness of men for certain graces of face and figure—which are in fact worthless, superficial, and tending only to the encouragement of wickedness."

The little schoolmistress knew not in the least how to defend herself against this torrent of words, but she did the best that she could. She opened wide the door of the cottage, and invited the angry woman to enter and see for herself.

So, as a prelude lifting her skirts to avoid possible contagion, the lady of Chaumont penetrated into the three rooms which made up the official residence of the schoolmistress of Les Bassettes. Everything was of the utmost simplicity. She saw first the red-bricked kitchen, with its few carefully scoured utensils, the little stove, cold and shining, a table and three chairs. Then she visited the parlour, with shelves for Alice's college-books and a few others. This tiny room was sweet with bunches of wild flowers which the children had brought to greet her that day. Indeed, she kept all her vases ready for them, fresh filled with water each morning. The bedroom, beyond, contained only a little white bed, the dressing-table with its simple accoutrement, and on the mantelpiece a photograph of the château of Villars Chaumont taken by some wandering photographer, with herself and Noélie as little white-frocked maids seated on the edge of the fountain, and the tall figure of David, then a lad at college, standing pensively by.

The carefully guarded souvenir kindled the ire of Madame. She reached out a strong hand, wrenched the poor little frame of carved wood from the nail

that held it, and threw it bodily out of the open window.

But this was too much for the little schoolmistress. With a sharp cry of pain she ran out of the door to find her treasure—her own—all she had to remind her of the good days of her childhood before the trouble came. As soon as she was gone Madame coolly profited by her absence to open the table-drawers, and turn over the papers in a box of japanned tin where Alice kept her diplomas and school papers. She regretted that she had no time to open the wooden trunk which stood on the floor in the corner, but the breaking open of a locked corner cupboard with a clasp-knife gave better results. She secured and pocketed two or three photographs and a packet of letters, sealed and marked "Private," in a hand-writing which seemed familiar.

With these Madame David the Elder felt herself sufficiently rewarded for her endeavours on behalf of the peace of her family hearth. That she had her quarrel just she felt assured, and now, with these private letters of the little schoolmistress, she felt that she was also triply armed.

But another foe met her in the doorway. Alice had called up her reserves. Instinctively she felt that she was no match for this overbearing woman, who in her childhood had ruled like a tyrant over her, and of whose angers she even now stood in awe. Not a very brave little woman, the schoolmistress, where only her own rights were concerned, and therefore much in need of an ally and protector to convoy her through the rough and tumble of life.

The present ally was no mean one. Anna Heller, wife of Jean of that name, was a woman of the best class of Swiss *fermières*. She had inherited the lands which they cultivated, and had in her time been counted both a notable beauty and an heiress.

She was of that sturdy, independent breed which has no fear of wealth or position. A good, plain-spoken woman, comfortably settled in life, she felt herself in no wise dependent on the greater folk of Château Villars.

Immediately she took the offensive.

"How dare you charge us, Madame, with having sequestered your daughter? That is a legal offence, and such as *we* have no need to commit. When have we been permitted to see your daughter? Not for many months—never since you began to keep her close at home; and your son? When he comes here, it is upon the duties of his calling. He is of age; ask him. Besides, he is our pastor. But you shall not trample through my rooms as you have through our poor Alice's. Get back to your work, child. The children will be missing you! I warrant that I shall be able to satisfy Madame Villars about you!"

Madame had, indeed, flinched before the storm. This was no meek Alice with the memory of early chastisements and threatenings weighing down her heart.

"My daughter has stolen away secretly on the pretext of nursing an enemy of our house," she resumed, pinching in her thin lips—"that is, one who calls himself the son of my late husband. From information which I received, and from a letter which

my son David has written, I was led to believe that my daughter had fled to you, and that you were concealing her from her relatives, and encouraging her in her disobedience."

"That information is false. Those who spread it are liars, and those who believe it are fools," said Madame Anna. "I warrant Pastor Alix did not give credence to a word of it. Why should we hide your daughter? Not for gain. Our lands are wider than yours—our title to them older. I have one husband, and I do not desire any more. You do us too much honour in judging us by yourself, Madame! Our house has never been a house of hiding, of secret dealing, or back-door smuggling. What we possess we have honestly earned."

"I say nothing to the contrary," said Madame, who began to find herself overmatched at her own weapons, "all I asked of you was the assurance that my daughter was not hiding here from her friends, and that designing persons were not drawing away my son from his loyalty to me and to his father's calling."

But the stout advocate was not to be disarmed.

"If you mean that as a slur on Mademoiselle Alice Brante," said Anna, "you can keep your taunts to yourself. I do not know anything about the affairs of your son. But if ever he should wish to marry, I can tell him—aye, and I have told him already—that he could not in half-a-dozen departments and all the confederation, find as good and loyal a wife! I count any man, pastor or prince, happy who gets her."

"Alice Brante is a beggar's girl reared on charity,

I tell you—my charity—and now you would encourage my son to disobey his mother. Never would I give my consent."

"Tut, tut," cried the undaunted Anna, "not so fast, Madame. Pastor David is the man of all others I most respect. But he has not won our Alice yet; when he has done so it will then be time to talk of wearing her. As to being poor, that is as may be. Jean and I have duly gone before a notary, we have had drawn up, signed, and sealed an instrument making our little Alice our heiress. Besides, for present use, there is a snug nest-egg in the *rentes*, bought when they were lowest, which will make our maid not an unhandsome dowry. And if you will lay down an equal sum on behalf of your son on the day of his marriage—why, Madame, let me say it plainly—it will be a great deal more than those who know you best expect of you!"

The lady of Chaumont took her way back as she had come, defeated indeed, but not discouraged. Her last words had been, "Never, never will I consent!" to which Anna had retorted, "Madame, your consent has not been asked."

But as she climbed the path, her silks rustling about her, she clasped the little bundle of letters marked "Private" which she had snatched out of the ravished corner cupboard in the bedroom of the little schoolmistress.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FIRE OF PURIFYING

IT is true that the bundle of letters marked "Private" on the outside, which Madame carried away from the cupboard of the little schoolmistress, was correctly so labelled. And when in the privacy of her chamber she noted the handwriting on the packet and the seal, Madame believed that she had in her hand all she had feared.

For in addition to the single word "Private" in a man's handwriting — and a handwriting strangely familiar to Madame Villars—there was a simple girlish endorsement, "Given to me by David," which made every fibre of her body quiver with indignation.

She broke the seal, and to her great astonishment found another enclosure, also sealed, upon which was written, "To be opened by Mademoiselle Alice Brante, my Ward, when she shall have the age of twenty-one years."

The writing which she had taken for her son's was that of her first husband, Pastor David Alix the Elder. It was no wonder she had been deceived, for father and son wrote much alike, with the difference that the hand of the father was rounder and less serried than that of the son.

The Fire of Purifying

With a heart that presaged some disaster, she who was still called Madame David the Elder forced the package which the hands of the elder David had sealed. A close-packed cluster of documents fell out, and slid loosely upon the table. The first she lifted and unfolded was a receipt from the Bank of Henri Villars & Cie., late of St. Gabriel (Var) and now of Neuchâtel (Suisse), for the sum of 500,000 francs (£20,000), signed by Henri Villars. The date was considerably after the failure in Provence, and the amount of interest was duly noted. The increase of the sum at the credit of Alice Brante, placed there by her guardian, was duly receipted for by the bank up to the date of the death of Pastor David the Elder. The other pieces comprised the certificate of Alice's birth, the marriage of her parents, and the will of her father, charging his "dear brother in the Lord, David Alix of Le Lochle, late of Geneva, to bring up his little girl Alice as simply as his own children, and on no account to divulge the secret of her fortune till she had attained the age of twenty-one years."

Madame sank back with a whirling brain, the papers scattered before her, some open, some slowly crumpling themselves up again into the form they had kept for twenty years, with odd cracklings of parchment and spasmodic squirms as if they were alive and deadly.

Deadly enough they were to this poor woman. She had meant to unmask the perfidy of a beggar-maid, who had tried her witchery on her own King Cophetua. And lo! there was enough in the papers she had stolen to wring from herself and her children half of all they possessed in the world.

It was all too easy to see what had happened. She owed this misfortune to her two husbands. She understood both of them, and could follow the working of their natures. David Alix, a silent, faithful, cautious man, had made the best investment of the fortune confided to him that seemed possible. He had arranged the terms and seen punctually to the accumulation of the capital, as the interest fell in year by year.

These papers had been privately placed with his own lawyer in charge for David. By David they had been received at his majority, and the envelope, unbroken, passed over to the little schoolmistress. Neither Alice nor the Pastor knew, therefore, what chance had placed in her hands. She thought with the hot retrospective anger of disappointment of the grave quiet man, who, entrusted with his friend's secret, had kept it carefully even from his own wife, and to his dying day had fulfilled the mission of the dead.

Ah! if he had only trusted her, his wife, what a difference to-day! The part of Henry Villars was not equally clear. The agreement and first receipt bore the stamp of the Mairie of the City of Neuchâtel, therefore it was likely that copies would be found in the cantonal archives. Yet after the death of Pastor David Alix the Elder there was no trace of the sum in the books of his banker. Henri Villars must therefore have taken it altogether out of the *actif* of the bank, or it would have remained there to this day accumulating interest. But when the Crédit Federal took over the Villars' private bank as a

going concern, there was no mention of any such sum.

What, then, had her husband done with the money? A light flashed upon her. A sum of three-quarters of a million francs had been paid for the property of Château Chaumont. She had never understood how that great sum had come into her husband's hands in hard cash. She had supposed that it was by some successful speculation of the nature of which he had not told her. Now the whole was clear. And her heated face took on an ashen hue of mortal sickness when she realised that in all probability every stone of the castle, every *arpent* of field and wood and vineyard belonged, not to herself and Noélie, but—to the little schoolmistress!

Now Madame David the Elder had all her days been, according to her lights, an honest woman. But then she had never been tried so high as this. Indeed, few human creatures have been so tried.

All the afternoon the lady of Villars Chaumont sat gazing at the papers in which she read the doom of her pride. She had not even thought of taking off her great mushroom-shaped hat, which had been pushed back from her heated brow, and hung with a comical cock (which was, to one who knew her, the essence of tragedy) over one ear. Her rich black silk rustled and sighed as if in sympathy with her distress.

When her servants came to the door to ask for orders, she bade them begone in tones which they hardly recognised as those of their mistress. Taking this in connexion with the strange disappearance of

Mademoiselle Noélie and the non-return of Pastor David, the domestics began to whisper about the house strange things of elopements, secret marriages, and the anger of the mother. But all of these stories, though springing full armed with circumstance from the ground, were far from explaining, even if true, the actual agony of mind that the poor woman suffered.

She was smitten where she was proudest—in the state and dignity of the richest *châtelaine* of a province. Her supplanter was the girl she had turned from her door. Her husband, Henri Villars, had obtained the ill-gotten money that had purchased for her this wide consideration—yes, and this power to help others—by destroying the evidence which recorded his indebtedness to the girl he had made an outcast.

But the dead hand of a more upright, farther-sighted man had been reached out from the grave, and the punishment must fall—not upon Henri Villars, the guilty, but upon his widow, the wholly innocent.

Half-a-dozen times Madame rose, laid the papers in the fireplace, and stood resolute before them with a match in her hand. Once she lighted it, and unto this day the receipt of Henri Villars is browned a little at one corner.

But this woman was fundamentally honest. Hard she was, but she had never held to money for its own sake. She was a liberal giver, and for that reason, in this strait, the Lord loved her—perhaps had mercy upon her. He put, at least, the best thought into her heart that could possibly have come there—though one that was conveying the poor woman to a new Calvary.

She suddenly snatched up the papers, and carried them, envelopes and all, down to the room where Herr Military Chaplain Hermann Falk was sitting composedly with his book. He turned rather listlessly, and laid down his book with a movement of boredom as he heard the approaching footsteps of his hostess. But when he saw her come in, her arms charged with papers, the tears forcing themselves from her eyes, and falling upon the parchments, he almost rose from his chair in alarm and astonishment.

"What has happened?" he said, hurriedly. "Not—not——"

He had no time to precise the trouble his mind foreshadowed, when Madame, spreading the papers before him and occasionally lifting her lace fichu from her neck to her eyes, began her story.

She passed the papers one by one over to him, and the face of the Military Chaplain grew graver and graver as the tale of the rascality of Villars was unfolded. Madame had now passed beyond tears, and was in the region of hard, dry sobs which she tried first to suppress, and then, finding this vain, to excuse.

"It is not that I care for myself," she said; "never was a woman happier than in a little house with fifty pounds a year. But my heart is broken for Noélie—yes, though she has been disobedient and undutiful—she has been brought up with the expectation of riches. She has never known poverty. This will kill her."

"Not at all," said the Chaplain calmly, "honest poverty kills nobody. The deceitfulness of riches is a far more dangerous disease."

"It is not as if I had been hard, selfish, ungrateful,"

she mourned. "God knows I have tried to be His steward. I have given as widely and as wisely as I could—without grudging and without counting. You have only to ask in all the country—from Besançon to Lochle."

"I know—I know it well," said the Chaplain soothingly. "I am a poor hand at consolation, Madame, but this I do know, that what is now taken from you, somewhere and somehow, will be restored fourfold."

"But *my* restoration also ought to be fourfold," she cried, rising from the table in great agitation, "the money was stolen. It has been kept back and misused for twenty years!"

"Not by you, dear lady," said the Military Chaplain; "you are innocent. And no one could have made a better use of the money which, all unwitting, you have held in trust."

"Not always—not always," mourned Madame David the Elder. She was thinking of the military companies she had equipped, and how little good they had wrought for the country of her birth and the district in which she dwelt.

Then she returned to her plaint about Noélie.

"David and I could go back to the little house at Le Lochle. It is still ours—or rather his. He has only his stipend, poor fellow, but then so had his father before him. Thank God, I am strong enough, and well enough, and my heart is stout enough to do the whole work of a household as I have done it before. But it is the fate of Noélie that rends a mother's heart."

The Fire of Purifying

The Military Chaplain moved a little uneasily in his chair. Twice he seemed about to speak, and twice he fell silent.

At last he appeared to make up his mind and struck out bravely.

"Madame, I have something of the greatest importance to say to you—something for which I would gladly have chosen another time and happier surroundings. I ask your pardon and I acknowledge that I have been wrong not to speak to you of the matter before."

During this prelude, in which the voice of the Chaplain of the Colbergers was more moved than she had ever heard it, strange glints of wonder, fear, and joy passed rapidly over the face of Madame David. She remained with her hat still dangling unheeded on her back, her eyes red, and her face at once harrowed with suffering and transfigured by hope.

The Chaplain proceeded, with the measured voice of one who had taken a strong grip of himself and had resolved to express his mind once for all.

"I feel for your cruel deception in this affair, dear Madame," he said, "but you have nothing to charge yourself with. And as for Noélie, your daughter, there is no need to be downcast. *I have had it in my mind for some time to ask very respectfully for her hand in marriage!*"

Then appeared, for the first time in this history, the full greatness of soul possessed by this hard, masterful woman. She actually tottered under the stroke of the disappointment. A low, hoarse sound like a groan burst from her lips, and her hands clutched the edge

of the table by which she had been standing. Hermann heard the rasp of the finger nails as they caught and slid along the wood. She managed, however, to reach a chair, into which she fell rather than sat down.

The Military Chaplain was astonished at the emotion which his proposition had excited.

"It is because of my nationality," he thought. And immediately, with the stubbornness of his race, he set himself to combat the objection.

"Your daughter is a Swiss by adoption," he went on, "I am of the Wendish lands which were, after long fighting, conquered by the Prussians. Without being rich, I am well situated as to worldly goods. If Noélie would be happier (or you happier about her) if I were to leave Berlin, I could find a place to exercise my calling elsewhere. I am not a boy to care for the distinctions of a court. Of these I have had my share——"

He would have gone on in this strain for some time, but Madame, who sat staring and watching him with grey face and twitching lips, faltered out her questions —the only two that mattered to her.

"You have told this to Noélie?"

"Madame," he answered, "I acknowledge with some shame and infinite regret—that in strict justice and propriety I ought—first—to have approached——"

She cut him short.

"*Have you told her?*"

"She knows that I love her!"

"Have you told her?"

"I have!" said the Chaplain, as if answering to his name on a roll-call.

"And she loves you?"

"I have some reason to believe so, Madame!"

"Answer me directly—no formulas—no evasions!" The voice of Madame David had risen to a cry of bitter agony. "*Has* she told you that she loves you?"

"She has!"

Then Madame David the Elder, tragic in her dishevelled silk and above it the grey face with the colourless lips, rose a second time, tottered a moment, clutched at the mantelpiece, steadied herself, and said falteringly, but with that astonishing accent of heart-broken childhood which comes with great grief, "I think—I shall go now—I am not well!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"AND GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT"

BROTHER and sister had a hard task before them, on the return of the little company from the burying-place. It lay "without the wall," where the dust of Ludovic Villars mingles with that of many generations of the faithful Huguenot remnant. Their business was to persuade La Petite Flore to allow them to depart. It had been eagerly debated between David and Noélie what recompense they could make for the difficulties and annoyances which the illness of Ludovic had caused to the post-mistress of Vercel-Adam.

But on the question of money La Petite Flore was adamant. She would not hear of it at all. They had, therefore, to think of something else.

"Have not you done as much and more for me and mine? Have I not to atone for my poor mother's fault—for the care you have taken of her on her wanderings? And think how lonely the house will be without you? Only the click of the telegraph and the whisper of the letters sliding into the window-

slit when you are gone! I shall be far more lonely now that I have known your society."

She looked towards David, but it was Noélie who answered.

"We must go and see our mother," she said; "we do not know what is waiting for us there. Our mother will be very angry. David has his work, but I must stay in the house."

Here her brother touched her on the shoulder.

"I will be there, Noélie," he said quietly; "it shall be my mission to speak with our mother. Have no fear, little sister!"

But, in spite of a secret she was keeping as a great final surprise, Noélie Villars could not keep back her tears as the time drew near. She wept on the shoulder of La Petite Flore, who supported her much as on a weary march she might have lent her shoulder to a wounded comrade. The postmistress held out her left hand to David.

"You have done me great service," she said; "I have dwelt with a good man in a house—a good man and a loving woman. I have seen a miracle done upon Ludovic Villars. There is truth in what you say, because there is power in what you do. Since they shot down my father and my brother over yonder at Les Collines above the lake, since madness drove my mother out into the wild, I have been without God—like so many about me. How in such times can one believe in a good God?"

"Yet," said David gravely, as was his wont, "you have had more cause than most. The wife of Job bade him 'curse God and die.' So also might you.

But who shall be received with greater joy by the angels than the daughter of Père François of Les Collines?"

It was one of our David's misfits that he was without a sense of humour—except, perhaps, of that elementary kind which consists in throwing a stone at a scarecrow and laughing when he hit it. He did everything seriously, with an intense gravity and consciousness of his mission. And perhaps it was this characteristic more than anything else which had procured him the name of "The-Man-Who-Always-Says-What-He-Means" — *L'Homme-qui-ne-blague-pas!*

But to break the pain of parting, Noélie called out sharply, "Come upstairs and see!"

The postmistress of Vercel-Adam followed her, wondering. For during her last visit to her mother there had been a great stir in the post-office. The *locum tenens* from Besançon had been carefully instructed to keep the secret. The bed in which Ludovic died had been replaced. The Besançon carrier had brought many things carefully packed. All had been fitted into place under cloud of night, and now brother and sister were to rejoice in the surprise which it had taken them such trouble and forethought to arrange.

La Petite Flore mounted to the redecorated bedroom where Ludovic had died. It was filled with Noélie's dainty refinement. The bed was of brass and copper, the pearl of all beds to be bought in Besançon. It was curtained lightly in blue and white, as were also the windows. Vases and flowers were everywhere. And, as there had been no time to lay

the floor in *parqueterie*, a pretty linoleum imitation had been laid down, blue and white also, with plenty of rugs and carpets scattered about. There was also a bookcase which Noélie had insisted on filling herself, because David's taste would have been too serious.

La Petite Flore paused dumb-stricken in the doorway. Noélie had opened the door and stood smiling with the latch in her hand. But La Petite Flore, to the amazement of both Noélie and David, put her hand to her face and wept silently, till the tears streamed through her fingers and fell on the black sleeves of her inky office blouse.

"Oh, but I never could sleep there," she cried; "it shall be kept for when either of you comes to see me!"

And the girl who had gone out to fight for her country, and who was as clever with the *chassepot* as with the defacing-stamp and the canvas mail-bag, trembled at the sight of the magnificence which had suddenly descended upon the little pavilion bedroom behind the post-house of Vercel-Adam.

"I never could sleep there—no, never," she repeated; "it would be a profanation. But—but—I shall keep it *so* clean!"

Afterwards, when La Petite Flore had grown a little accustomed to her fortune, she fell back upon the natural politeness of her class, and as an unmarried girl, thanked David and Noélie in her mother's name. She further committed a great breach of regulations by insisting upon going herself to seek for the owner of the only vehicle to be had for hire in Vercel-Adam.

"Old Imbert can be a rascal," she explained, "though he is an honest man enough, in his own village. Because if a man wants fair dealing in Vercel-Adam, he has to deal fair, and get a name for it. But old Imbert would charge two prices if he knew you were strangers. But I will pay for the *voiture* and see that he puts 'Henri V.' in the shafts, because the 'Count de Paris' always goes lame after the first half-mile." She paused a moment, and then continued, as if estimating a purely business advantage:

"He will give it cheaper to me, also, the cunning old toad, because he wants to marry me——"

"To marry you, Flore, and you never told me!" Noélie's voice was full of complaint and reproach. Evidently confidences had not been mutual.

"Oh, only since I got the post-office and so became an official," said La Petite Flore, quite calmly; "he wants to do nothing all the last years of his life, and then I should have to bring up his children!"

"Surely you will never consent to such a thing?"

"Who—I? Marry old Imbert the carrier? Not if there were no other man in all France. I will pay for no man's absinthe. And, besides," she went on reflectively, "there is the new room. That must be considered! Think of old Imbert *there!*"

And it was quite evident that, in La Petite Flore's ideas of matrimony, she was going to choose a husband to suit the blue and white magnificence of the guest-chamber in the pavilion which David and Noélie had redecorated for her.

And indeed from that day forward the post-office of Vercel-Adam lived up to the "guest-chamber" of

its mistress. Strips of inscribed brass held the notices as to rates of postage and times of despatching foreign mails. Copper clips caught the corners of telegraph forms. The varnished planks of the official bureau took on a new gaiety from the blue and white stripes of the window curtains, and as it was the era of dados, La Petite Flore painted one herself in imitation of the keyboard pattern of the linoleum-covered floor above.

All this was done at her own cost. The postmistress saved money for her improvements, and there is no doubt that the official inspector was considerably surprised the next time he stepped inside.

But it was a time of change, and his own position was precarious. So the official confined himself to praise of Mademoiselle François' handiwork. He had heard rumours of future honours awaiting the tall young postmistress, and in any case one does not reprove, even officially, the ex-captain of the Laroche corps of *franc-tireurs*. So the inspector of postal bureaux for the south-eastern district found that all was perfect in that of Vercel-Adam. It was only when, in far-away and unsympathetic Paris, an official began to remark that the letters emanating from this remote village had been date-stamped printed in a clear and shameless blue, that a stop was put to the ravages of the redecorated guest-chamber. La Petite Flore reverted to the ugly but official black with a sigh, and comforted herself by running up to glance at the sacred room during most intervals of business. That at least no Government could forbid. Every morning she cleaned and aired it before going down

to the work of the office ; every evening she went over it with a duster and a feather brush before locking it up and retiring to her old camp-bed in the dusky little room behind the office. And whenever David Alix entered, with the upheld hand of benediction and the words " God's blessing be upon this house and all that is therein," she always knew that he must be thinking of the " spare room." At least if, being only a man, he forgot, La Petite Flore remembered for him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HE SHALL RESTORE FOURFOLD

THAT afternoon, during the hours when Madame agonised over the papers which she had stolen from the cupboard of the little schoolmistress, Ludovic Villars had passed gently away. He had been unconscious till within a few minutes of the end, when he suddenly turned to Noélie, who had been sitting by his side watching him.

"Will you go to St. Gabriel and pay our father's debts?" he asked.

Noélie promised that, so far as she could do it, the memory of Henri Villars should be cleared in his native town.

"I am sorry to trouble you, little sister," he said. "If I had lived, that would have been my life's work. But I put it off too long and now it is too late."

To David he said little more, but only feebly pressed his hand at intervals in token of understanding and faith. As the darkness rose chill about him he turned his head as if seeking for something or somebody.

"David," he said, "are you holding my hand?"

"I am holding it in both of mine, my brother," he answered.

"Thank you," said Ludovic Villars; "the morning is dark, surely. Only now do I begin to see a little. Kiss me, sister Noélie. Your blessing, David!"

And as he passed, David committed the soul that had wandered so far to the keeping of God and His Christ.

They buried him quietly, yet not so very sadly, in the little churchyard of the Protestant communion at Besançon, and David wrote the inscription upon his tomb:

LUDOVIC VILLARS
Advocate of the Bar of Montpellier
Entered into Rest
the 20th August, 1871
"God said, 'Let there be Light.' And there was Light"

It took all David's private stores of faith and all his influence of elder brother to decide Noélie to face her mother. She knew, indeed, that David had written to explain her flight, but as to what Madame thought of that letter, how she would receive them, or what had happened at the Château during these weeks, she was ignorant.

She kept, however, her faith in David. David was not afraid. Even Madame herself feared her son. At home all things went easier when he was there. His gentle persistence alone could break her mother's angry will.

They jolted slowly towards the *bassins* in the carrier's waggon, with "Henri V.," the strong bay

horse of noble name, between the shafts. So they arrived at the lake side in the full glow of an autumn afternoon, and Noélie clapped her hands at the sight of the familiar water lying there like a wide river of emerald, the rosy cliffs of the Swiss shore reflected marvellously, and on the hill above the white walls, deep verandahs, and red roofs of Château Villars.

But the joy died out of her when she remembered that her mother was up there—that she had been nursing and caring for the Military Chaplain all the time. And in her own heart she recognised that it was not wholly the letter of her brother Ludovic that had sent her over the wall so quickly that hot afternoon, with the care and connivance of the imp of Pierre-à-Feu.

As they crossed the lake, the peace of the afternoon spread wider about them. With a sigh of relief they left behind them the war-tormented region where they had sojourned so long. Even David's heart grew glad as he watched the ruddy cliffs grow nearer, and saw come into view a certain white streak of water-lilies that shut in the Bay of Pargots. He could see the smoke from Madame Anna's chimney at Les Bassettes, but the little schoolhouse was hidden. He bade the man row faster. It was better to have it over—that meeting with their mother, which was fastening an ever-deepening shadow in the face of his little Noélie.

Besides, there was the schoolhouse. Nothing could be more certain to David's mind, that as a pastor charged with the highest interests, he had been of late

neglecting that part of his flock domiciled on the eastern side of the lakes. Even that night—but he checked his thought. After all, his mother and Noélie were his first consideration. And he choked down manfully his half-conscious intention of going immediately to the farm of Jean and Anna.

As they climbed the last slopes Noélie more than once stopped and put up her hand to still the beating of her heart. Presently they were under the shadow of the great house. Noélie would have been glad once more to escalade the walls and mount unseen to her chamber by the ladder which the imp had left leaning against the wall.

But without a word David took her hand and they entered the courtyard together. Strangely, there was no eager press to meet them, no cry of surprise from the barns and haylofts. The farm lads, labourers, and shepherds were, of course, afield. But there seemed now to be none of the bands which Madame David the Elder had encouraged to rendezvous in the out-houses of Château Villars.

Pastor David Alix was struck by a sudden fear of catastrophe. What if the evil so long menacing had, in his absence, fallen upon his mother and her house? Hermann Falk might still be an object of hatred, or at least, to some of the scattered band of prowlers and plunderers, an excuse for looting so rich a house as Château Villars.

They entered by the front door. The hall closed in silently about them. David was going to the kitchen hurriedly, sure that there, if anywhere, his mother would be found; but at the first sound of

footsteps Madame David the Elder came out into the hall.

David and Noélie stood silent and stricken by the change in their mother's appearance. She was quite another person. They had left her a middle-aged but still comely woman, her hair crow-black and glossy, her every action quick, alert, decisive. Her foot was light on the stairs. The eye was that of the manager who takes in everything. Her hand was quick in case of need at every busy moment, her tongue well hung for command—free of admonishment, sparing of praise. And yet withal, Madame was a popular woman, firm, ready, generous, dominating her little world with, on the whole, very little friction and no effort at all.

But this was an old woman who stood before them. The grey about the temples had spread, sent out runners, and now threaded the whole with links of silver. She had, as it were, fallen in upon herself. Yet after the first halt of astonishment at the sight of her children on the threshold, she closed the door behind her, and stood waiting, her eyes strangely moist, and what was most unexpected and moving, smiling upon them with an eager tenderness at once encouraging and pitiful.

As if in answer to an appeal Noélie rushed to her mother, and clasped her about the neck. Then with her head pressed against the old black-stuff dress which Madame wore, she wept freely.

"I did not mean to go like that, mother," she said. "I have been a wicked girl. But it came upon me suddenly. I felt I could not stay any longer locked

up in my room; and then my brother—Ludovic's letter——"

She was not allowed to proceed, for Madame David the Elder put her arm upon her daughter's shoulders and looked long into her eyes.

"Not you, but I, Noélie, have been the foolish one. But God has reined me sharply in. I shall not offend Him again—at least, not so terribly. In mercy He has humbled my pride." But in a moment more her mood had altered.

She turned her eyes upon her son with some of the old spirit in them.

"You will be able to preach about your mother now, David. She was proud; she never forgot, never forgave. None ever beat her temper down, and those who tried, found it best to leave her and dwell apart. Oh, I have seen it. But now the Lord has broken your mother down, David. It is I who have to ask your pardon, Noélie. I forgot that you were not a child but a woman. I have learned things hard and bitter while you have been away. I am stripped as naked of pride as when I came into the world. But it is the Lord's doing and marvellous in these old eyes."

David kissed his mother's hand, at once gently and humbly. There are few things more touching than the voluntary humiliation of some one but lately hard and proud. He could not take his eyes off his mother's dress of plain black, worn and old. The sight caused strange memories to move in the young man. He was taken back to the ancient pastor's house at Le Lochle. He saw his father coming down

the street and opening the iron gate, and his mother in that very black dress running to open the door to him. There they had dwelt together in unity. A breath of goodness seemed to run through the house when his father entered, tired from his day's work.

He had never seen his mother wear that dress since those far-off days; and, as he looked, something of the old love, the child's love which his mother had deliberately put at arm's length from her, flooded back into his heart. Never had his soul yearned towards his mother as when she stood before him, old, worn, and very pitiful in the black dress of his father's time.

Madame David the Elder saw the love kindle in her son's eyes, and knew that, after the cup had been drunk, this would be the beginning of the reward.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SWEET DROP IN THE BITTER

BUT the dregs of her cup were not yet drunk, and she wished to make an end.

"Come with me," she said—"come—you, David, and Noélie. I have that to say to you which must not be put off, which shall not be put off, lest the evil thing, which is my pride, grows strong again and shuts the words within my heart."

She drove them before her into the little room which had been her second husband's office. His strong box was still there; the drawers containing his business papers, lettered and arranged; the plain wooden bureau with the leather-seated chair, and the worn place on the arms where Henri Villars had rested his hands when he thought, drumming his fingers the while on the wood, and looking out of the window at the bit of red wall with the vine clambering over it.

"My children," she began, after she had sat down and rocked herself to and fro for a minute, as was her habit when in trouble, "I have that to confess to you which goes hard against the grain, as from a parent to a son and daughter."

Then, without in the least sparing herself, she told them of her visit to Les Bassettes, her interview with the little schoolmistress, the theft of the papers, and what she had found therein.

And as David listened he muttered to himself, not over well satisfied, "Alice Brante—little Alice, heiress of all this." Then suddenly remembering that whatever Alice gained would be at the expense of Noélie he looked over at his sister to see how much she understood. She seemed distressed and her face was pale, but she only said, "Then I shall not be able to pay my father's debts in Provence, as Ludovic made me promise to do before he died."

The next moment she went to her mother and knelt beside her.

"If we are poor, mother—well, for myself I shall not care. We shall all be poor together. We can live with David in a small house somewhere. You will cook and I shall do the housework. If David can afford it, we might have a village woman in to help for an hour or two a day, and to do the washing. I do not think I should be of much use at that." Her mother answered her:

"Many a year I have done your—I mean David's father's linen and pulpit bands, and I never was happier. But then," she sighed, "that was different. I was young."

She went to the great safe, which in its day had harboured so many strange secrets. With the well-known jingle of keys drawn out of the side-pocket under her gown, a swift action in which something of her old self was seen, she opened the heavy doors

and took out the bundle of papers she had found in the schoolhouse. To these she added the title deeds of Château Villars, and a cheque on the Cantonal Bank of Neuchatel.

"This is not, indeed, restoring fourfold," she said, "but along with her legal due which I willingly resign, I *give* Alice Brante something which will make up a hundred times—I give her my son."

David started to his feet. His face flamed suddenly scarlet.

"Mother," he cried, "I have never—I would never——"

"No!" she answered calmly, "would you not? Then the more fool you. But now you will do what your mother bids you——"

"Gives me leave," amended David, speaking almost in a whisper. But his mother heard him.

"Bids you, I say." The voice of his mother dominated the situation. "Why, David, you are good, but there is no need to make yourself out a simpleton. And if I did not remember about the pastoral visitations at Les Bassettes two or three times a week, I might think you meant it."

Like many men of shy and reserved nature, the Pastor had hardly owned his love for Alice Brante even to himself. He was her brother, her big brother. She was his little sister Alice, for whom he had climbed the trees at Lochle to find the ripe chestnuts to cook on the old rusty tripod behind the barn. Such affection was natural, simple, innocent, and, lest any should put a warmer interpretation upon it, David Alix had hidden even that away in the depths of his heart.

That is to say, he thought he had. For all the while that he hugged his secret closer to him, and rejoiced that it was unsuspected by any, by his mother, by Alice, by all the world, it was being passed with nods and wreathed smiles from hamlet to hamlet, cried on the housetop in gossip-loving villages, and slily hinted at even to his unsuspecting face by men as widely apart as Jean Heller and the Military Chaplain, Hermann Falk.

"Off with you, David," said his mother, impatient to finish; "I am not a woman to do things by halves. Once I spoke in my haste. I owe a great reparation to Alice Brante; be you my messenger. I have changed my mind. Make thou my peace with the little one. She is a girl among a thousand, but I trust you will have the sense to tell her so on your own account before bringing your mother into the matter. Yet I would not put it past you. You might not know even so much, unless you were told."

With his customary obedience to his mother in things which did not directly concern his office, David rose, saluted his mother on both cheeks and went out without speaking. His mother stole softly to the window to watch him strike up the fell and across the ravines towards the schoolhouse.

She motioned to Noélie to stay where she was. Yet with her arm outstretched, palm backwards, she seemed to keep her away from the window, as if she wished to be alone to see the last of her son. With her back to her daughter she watched him mount up the rugged path, lightfooted as a goat, a born cragsman. Then standing a moment on the green turf that peeped

over the brink, she saw him wave his hand to her. Instinctively his mother drew back a little from the window, as if, even so far away, he might spy out the moisture in her hard old eyes.

"I am doing all things for the best—or, if I am not, God is deceiving me. The way was revealed to me and I have tried to walk in it. Pity of me, to be an old woman and to be robbed of both my children in one day. I am even as Job. Land and pride, son and daughter have I lost. More—I have foundered my self-respect. Now I am striving to pay back fourfold, though the cost be my life. Fourfold," she continued to mutter—"fourfold."

She paused and gazed fixedly at the little hillock above the deep ravine where Breslin the smith lay entombed, unknown to any on the earth save one. She knew that beyond it David would for a moment reappear as he topped the rise. A little round dot showed itself, ascended till it assumed the shape of a mark of exclamation, then as swiftly descended and disappeared.

His mother clasped her hands together in a kind of swift agony.

"Oh, he is running to be the sooner there—running bareheaded." The words seemed to be wrung from her. Then quite as quickly a bitter smile came over her face, and she laughed low to herself.

"Well, no matter, the chit loves him. Any one can see that a mile off. She will make him a good enough wife. She will worship him, give him his own way, think every word he says or does a very gospel. It would not do for some men. But it will not matter

to David. He will never even notice. Beside (she paused a while and the smile grew perceptibly grimmer), after all, Château Villars and the money will stay in the family."

The old Adam, or the not less ancient Eve, had still many words to sav in the heart of Madame David the Elder.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BITTER CUP

MADAME DAVID the Elder turned from the window with a sigh that stopped suddenly in the middle, and in a woman of more tender nature might have ended in something perilously near a sob. As she confronted her daughter she seemed both older and sterner. Noélie expected reproaches for her flight, for her long absence. But her mother, standing threateningly before her, motionless and pale, one lean forefinger raised from the table by which she was standing, fixed her with the single question:

"*You have told him that you love him?*"

"Who—told who?" stammered Noélie, who had been taken entirely at unawares. "I do not understand, mother!"

"Tell no lies, girl!" said Madame David the Elder, coldly menacing, "I know. *He* had the better courage, for he owned it at the first word."

A flush mounted suddenly to the girl's cheek. Her eyes brightened.

"He owned what?" she demanded, with a certain quickness. But the flash in her mother's black eyes answered, beating her down.

"There," she said, "you have confessed. 'He has owned,' you say. And yet you do not ask who the *he* may be—because you know."

Then Noélie also took the tone of courage, as if in defiance of such hard dealing.

"I do know," she affirmed. "What did he say?"

"Have you no shame, girl?" cried the mother; "it was not thus that maids in my time spoke of such things. They did not drop from windows and steal away from their mothers' houses. They did not own love for a man—before——"

"What did he *say?*" persisted Noélie hardily. She had risen and was now standing up within a yard of her mother, her hand bent, knuckles downward, upon the table in precisely the same attitude. Mother and daughter were infinitely more akin than mother and son.

"He said you had owned to his face that you loved him!" said Madame David the Elder bitterly.

"But first?" demanded Noélie, neither denying nor in the least giving way.

"First?" repeated her mother, astonished.

"Yes," said Noélie, "if he said that I owned to loving him. What did he say first?"

Up to this point there had been no mention of names, both women feeling instinctively that to mention a name would cause the storm to break. But now Madame David spoke plainly. "I was informed," she enunciated the words with formal dignity, "by Military Chaplain Falk of the Prussian Army, that he proposes to ask your hand in marriage——"

"Go on," said Noélie breathlessly.

"And that—that you——"

"No, *he*—what did *he* say?" Noélie was not to be turned aside. She had a steadfast persistence which was quite as effective as her mother's fiercer sternness.

"He said that he loved you——"

"And——" Noélie was inexorable.

"That he had told you so!" said her mother in a low voice.

At this the younger would have embraced the elder, but now Madame held Noélie at arm's length. The thing was gently enough done, but on her countenance there was not the least symptom of yielding. There was an element in the sacrifice she was making for Noélie which had not been present in her sending of David to Alice Brante. She felt that she ought, if her renunciation were to be complete, to tell this to her daughter. But something shamefaced and youthful withheld her. Could a mother confess the follies of her age to the babe she had nursed in her arms?

"No," she said, communing with herself, "not yet awhile. I am an old woman and foolish. Already I have smarted for my folly, and now I mean to pay the price. But if I have wronged any, it has been for your sake—yours and your brother's—not for my own, God be my judge! Yet I only am punished—yes, I am punished indeed."

"Mother," pleaded Noélie, now contrite for her late pertinacity, "please listen to me——"

"Child," her mother answered, with a sigh, "I have listened too long to self, to pride, to anger. I will remove from out of this house, and it shall once more be an abode of peace. I have battled enough

for gain, and, as I thought, for fatherland. The old head is weary—the old bones fain would rest."

"Surely, mother, you will never go from those who love you—from David and me?" cried her daughter.

"Ah! had it only been David and you," answered her mother, with a quick, nervous laugh, "I would have kept the roof over our three heads. But young birds in their mating year must have their nests to themselves. Look at the beehives yonder under the wall of the orchard—it is the old who in June take wing to seek another home."

"Mother," said Noélie, "say the word, and I promise you that whatever happens I will not leave you!"

"The word has already been said—all that needs to be said—all that can be said. Go up to—your—to your friend. He will be thinking the time long. I shall be in the *basse cour* when you come back. Go!"

And she pointed with her finger to the stairway which led to the pleasant chamber looking out on the Swiss Jura, in which the Military Chaplain had lived so long with his books and writings. Slowly and unhappily Noélie mounted the steps. There was nothing of the wild chamois gait about her, with which David had devoured the road to Les Bassettes—that is, so soon as he had judged himself out of sight of his mother. Noélie's conscience rebuked her, she hardly knew for what. Her heart was sore not to be in friendship with her mother. Yet she went on. She knew that, in the meanwhile, there was no need appealing to her any more. Time

must work its perfect work. But she turned back once. If her mother had been looking after her, as she had seen her do after David as he disappeared over the hill, she would even yet have flown to her arms. But Madame had turned grimly on her heel and betaken her out among the cattle and the poultry, close-lipped, and with a countenance stern and non-committal.

Suddenly, and before she was ready for it, appeared before her the door of the Chaplain's sitting-room. For the first time Noélie shrank in sudden fear. A kind of nervous panic seized her. She tried to knock and could not. But she was relieved from all further trouble by the door opening of itself inwards and finding herself, without a single word spoken, in the arms of the Military Chaplain.

* * * * * *

Preliminaries having thus been thrust aside, somewhat "after the fashion of the hussars," as they say in France, rational conversation became not wholly impossible.

Noélie explained all about her escape from the window after receiving the letter from Ludovic Villars. She told, without anger but with much wonder, of the strange behaviour of her mother, who had punished her for she knew not what, by confining her day after day to her room.

"Perhaps," suggested Hermann Falk, "it was because she did not approve of her good little Swiss maiden marrying a naughty Prussian!"

"You are not a naughty Prussian," cried Noélie. "You yourself told me that you were—what funny thing was it?—oh, yes—a Wend!"

"They were pagans," smiled the East Prussian. "How could a pagan be a Military Chaplain?"

"More military than chaplain, I doubt!" said Noélie, plucking up heart as she began to feel more safe. And then suddenly clapping her hands and leaping up from where she had been seated—in spite of the protestations of Hermann, who hypocritically pretended that she had hurt his wounded shoulder—she cried, "Oh, but I forgot. I cannot marry you. I am poor now. I have not a penny in the world. All that was mine—all I thought was mine, I mean—really belongs to little Alice Brante. Mother found out about it, and she is going to give it all back to her. David has gone to tell her now."

"Y-e-s-s! I saw him," said the Chaplain drily; "he seemed to be in a hurry to carry such bad news!"

The girl looked at him with arch understanding.

"Perhaps you miss him. Perhaps you would rather that he had come to see you than I?"

"Not if you have come about the same business as he is on, and will be in as big a hurry to get it finished!" said the Chaplain, quick as echo.

Noélie looked her immense amazement.

"And what might that business be?" she asked, apparently so bewildered that she permitted herself to be re-established in her former place without seeming to notice it.

"Why," said the Chaplain, with more than military brusqueness, "to settle our marriage-day and get it over as soon as possible!"

"Get it over as soon as possible!" gasped Noélie, who had never yet faced anything but the vague,

far-off vision of a possible engagement, with the Military Chaplain writing her long letters full of quotations of poetry, and pressed *edelweiss* between the leaves as tokens of fidelity.

"*Our* marriage-day—certainly—what else?" said the Chaplain peremptorily. "You have promised to marry me, haven't you?"

"But now I am so poor—so——"

"Well," said the Chaplain, "if we are very hard up, you can take in sewing—and—let me see, can you wash?"

"Not very well," said Noélie, a little scared, to be sure. For he spoke so gruffly in his North German voice that she did not know whether he was in jest or earnest—"pocket handkerchiefs I can do, and lace, and so on—but——"

She paused doubtfully.

"Can you wash a shirt?" thundered the Military Chaplain.

"I—think—I could," said Noélie, really frightened now, "but—I—am not sure about the ironing!"

"That is essential!" said the Chaplain sternly.

Whereupon Noélie, hearing this, fairly burst into tears. Then the Chaplain, smitten with quick remorse, took her head, and keeping it down upon his wounded shoulder in a way which showed how very far his convalescence had proceeded, explained to her—first, that she was a silly little goose; secondly, he called himself a great Wendish donkey and various other animals noted in different languages for their blundering stupidity. Thirdly and lastly, he explained that he did not wish any money from his

wife. He had quite enough for both, and if it pleased her to live in quiet, he would give up his place at court and they would take up house in her own country of Switzerland.

"My mother," he added, smiling, "will welcome you as a daughter, but she will be very glad to shift upon your shoulders the responsibility of looking after my health. She will give you at least a hundred receipts for my different ailments, from teething onwards. But I warn you here and now that if ever you attempt to poison me with any one of them, out it goes at the window and perhaps you after it! I have suffered many things at the hand of my mother. But with my wife—why, that is a very different matter."

And Noélie thought that the words "my wife" sounded so delightfully that she fixed the date of the wedding on the spot, subject only to the still undeclared decision of the little schoolmistress over the way.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"OH, YOU MAN!"

DAVID ALIX sped on his errand even faster than his mother had been aware of. As he went he bethought himself how he had guided Alice's toddling steps among the vines of Lochle; how he had carried her home on his back from long expeditions when she was a golden-haired mite; how first he had chaperoned her to school, and for her sake fought one of the rare battles of his life with a bigger boy. He had pulled Alice's hair, that big boy, and called her names—"Nobody's Child" and "Whiteface," David remembered the words. And his own answer ought to have filled him with shame, but somehow did not. "Miller Thorn's Karl, I will make you Redface!" he had said. And straightway he had proceeded to do it.

Many pastors and ministers have had these little experiences in their youth, but it is rare to meet one who is not secretly proud of them, especially if victorious.

Still at his long hillman's trot, tireless and easy, David recalled the sad day when little Alice was to leave Château Villars to go to school. They had met to say good-bye, the youth home from college and the

little girl entering life for the first time alone. They thought, as she had clung to him weeping, that they would never see each other again. But nevertheless David had made brave promises. They would meet often. He would never forget her. But Alice only clung the tighter to her kind big brother and sobbed. With the instinct of a woman, the girl of ten knew that the master of the Château did not love her, and was getting rid of her for good. David only remembered that it was raining, and that her hair was damp and heavy on his hands.

He slackened his pace a little as the chimneys of Les Bassettes came into view. He recalled (somewhat late in the day, it is true) that it was scarce seemly that a pastor of the Evangelical Church of Geneva should be seen running the hills like a schoolboy. Then he smiled at himself, because, as he well knew, there was none to see, if it were not the wandering man of Pierre-à-Feu or the imp his son.

David Alix smiled yet more at his folly, as he assured himself by a touch here and there that his dress was in order.

"You," he said—"you ought to be ashamed of yourself, sirrah; you are no better than a lovesick boy!"

But, strangely enough, self-reproaches of this kind had, for that day at least, no power to move the Pastor of the Jura. There are days in the life of every minister when the office is lost in the man.

And it was the man who, reassured and with a dusty handkerchief (from flicking his boots) in the tail pocket of his coat on the left, strode round the farm

buildings and across the little playing-platform towards the door of the schoolhouse. His eyes were questing this way and that for Jean Heller and his wife Anna. Brave souls, he need not have troubled. Anna had marked him down or ever he came within half a mile of the house. As he approached she noted his hurried gait, his disordered dress, his eyes fixed on the schoolhouse door. She had been a delighted witness of the pause for toilette purposes which the Pastor had made in the hollow—as he thought with none to see.

It was this which finally decided her. Anna Heller departed hurriedly in quest of Jean. What a pity it was that men had no tact. He was entirely capable, had he met David, of taking hold of him by the arm, guiding him past the schoolhouse, and compelling him to come straight in to supper.

"Supper," said Anna scornfully—"there is your true man, he could stop to think of supper at such a time. Oh! glad am I to see this day. Now where is that Jean?"

Thirty seconds afterwards Jean Heller, peacefully whistling in his own stable, putting his house in order before bedding down his horses, was haled incontinent across the yard by the arm, and without a moment's pause, taken through the kitchen into the little parlour, the joy of Anna's heart. A newspaper a week old, which he had already perused and re-perused till he knew the advertisements by heart, was thrust into his hands.

"Now stay where you are and don't dare budge till I tell you," said his wife, giving him a shake; "no!

HALED INCONTINENT ACROSS THE YARD BY THE ARM.

never mind the horses just now, they will neither starve nor run away. Sit still there and behave, I tell you. You are not to be trusted, you *man!*"

The coast thus cleared of the main obstacle, Anna Heller found work in the barn and outhouses for all the farm hands who happened to be at home. Then she stole on tiptoe to the door of the passage which led behind the mows to the schoolhouse. She slid a bar, and went as softly back. Then she went into the parlour to keep an eye on Jean, who in confinement might be inclined to be rebellious if left too long without the master's eye.

Anna rated her husband sharply when he asked humbly to be informed what it was all about. She told him to read the paper, and picking up her knitting commenced the swift little lightning play of the needles, with such obvious inattention to Jean's remarks that at last he got up and went to the window.

"Bless me," he cried, whirling about on his heel and making for the door, "if that is not Pastor David going straight across the playground to the schoolhouse. I wonder why he has not come here? I will go and see, and you can invite Alice in to supper!"

He had almost reached the door when he found his wife before him, her hand on the latch, her eyes sparkling with anger and contempt.

"You will do nothing of the sort," she cried vehemently. "You will sit still where you are. Why do you suppose I brought you in from the stable? One would think that you had never come across the hills yourself, quietly in the gloaming, without wanting

all the world running out after you to ask idiotic questions!"

As Anna stamped her foot a light came upon Jean's darkened understanding. He thrust his hands very far down into his pockets and whistled.

Anna came close up to him and shook a clenched fist in his face with a scornful anger, which, however, was mingled with some grains of compassionate pity.

"Oh, you *man!*" she said again.

Jean Heller sat down heavily, and fell to reading advertisements of Gala Peter Milk Chocolate, with the humility of his sex in the presence of that other, which is its superior in the things which lie outside of the knowledge of the schools.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"NOT LONG A-DOING"

ALICE BRANTE'S heart was beating rarely when she saw the tall figure of David Alix in the doorway. She had known by the reports which Madame David the Elder had put into circulation to explain her children's absence that the Pastor was detained in the Besançon district by the war troubles, also that Noélie was aiding him to nurse the wounded. Nevertheless, the time had seemed long, and though it did not cross her mind that David would write to her, she thought that by chance he might have found time to send a letter to the Hellers, who were such great friends of his.

Her pulse was quick, therefore, as she went to the door, her heart beating unequally, but from her face no one would have known it. She was only rather pale and very quiet, this little schoolmistress. Gone were her wild gambols in the playground where David had once seen her, a child among the children. The hope which was a fear, and the fear lest that hope should prove vain, made her eyes mysterious, widening the pupils till even the iris grew darkly expressive,

with a lingering gentleness like a touch of the appeal of a frightened child.

David had his message ready on his tongue-tip. First he would tell her what was in his heart—his long and faithful love; in its beginnings hardly known even to himself, but going to the roots of his nature—his waitings also, his hopings. How he had watched her often from the hillside above when she was playing among her children, all unconscious (was she quite?). Also all that he had felt at being so long sundered from her during the weeks he had spent at Vercel. Then he would speak of his work; of how she, and she alone, could help him. Then, and not till then, when he was sure of her sympathy, would he speak of what his mother had done—of the papers stolen, of the heritage alienated for so many years.

But suddenly, even as he stood before her, he saw the appalling meanness of all this. He seemed degraded in his own eyes even to have thought of it. What! thus to win by surprise the love of a rich girl, the heiress of Château Villars and of the moneys which Henri Villars of St. Gabriel had laid away in the Crédit Federal of Neuchâtel! He turned from himself in disgust. If he married Alice he was the supplanter of his own sister. To enrich himself he must make Noélie poor.

And as he stood with outstretched hand on the threshold, these thoughts were seething within him. They bereft him of speech. His face wrought and his frame trembled with a great agitation. Fortunately so, for the little schoolmistress, the blood flooding to her cheeks, held out both her hands and looked up at

him with moist eyes of immense gladness—the joy that she had never dared hope to call her own.

David loved her! She was sure of it now—and *that way!* Altogether and for always—just as she wanted to be loved! And as the love in the eyes of the little schoolmistress met the trouble in those which looked down into them, something kindled suddenly within him. He forgot all the lessons he had been setting himself painfully to learn. He forgot the disgust with which he ought to have regarded himself as the despoiler of his sister.

He read that on the face of the little schoolmistress which, if a man hath never seen, though he be millionaire or billionaire, he is poor indeed. A woman—the woman, glad to give herself to him absolutely.

"Alice," he gasped, "I have come——" And he meant that to be the beginning of his confession, the preface of his renunciation, but she did not let him proceed.

"Thank God you have come!" she said, and seemed to totter as she said it; for there had been a long strain of anguish and anxiety upon the little schoolmistress since she had received the visit of Madame David the Elder. Now it was over. He had come. He had not been staying away on purpose, or at the bidding of his mother. She, too, had cherished visions of renunciation. Yes, she would give him up—she would never marry him, even suppose that he were to ask her on his knees, without the consent of that cruel woman, his mother. Yes, she was cruel, she was—she was!

But all this now vanished, even as the slight mist in a river valley is drunk up at a draught by the July sun. He was holding her hands and stammering. He could hardly speak a word intelligibly, yet the little schoolmistress thought him more eloquent than in any sermon he had ever preached.

She smiled at his agitation, joyous to think that she, lately so neglected and forlorn, could be the cause of it. The tremulousness of his voice, the convulsive grasp of his hands, were as a crown of glory to her. Ah! how she would make up to him for all that he had suffered. Dear David!

Perhaps the words escaped her, or maybe some subtle current of sympathy carried them to David's inner ear, the one whose drum is the heart, for he answered, quick and low, skipping at once to the superlative, "Dearest Alice!"

She grasped his hands tight with quick, nervous grasp.

"You love me, David—really, really?"

"I love you," said David Alix mournfully, "but I ought not."

"Oh, on account of your mother," she answered him lightly, waving away the objection as something she had long discounted; "but you *do* love me? You are sure?"

David was all too sure.

"Then," cried Alice, swaying far back away from him, and holding his hands tight to keep herself from falling, "I love you too, and as for the rest, I do not care. We can wait——"

"Wait?" repeated David doubtfully, "what for?"

"Till your mother gives her consent, of course," said Alice, now gay as a bird. She had adjusted the toes of her little shoes to his big, mountain-conquering boots, and was swinging herself to and fro, sure of being upheld by the grasp of his hands, as she used to do long ago in the romps of their childhood.

"But my mother *has* given her consent," said David mournfully. "It is not that."

Instantly Alice Brante sprang erect. She quietly released her hands, folded them before her, and said, "Then—you—don't—wish—to—to marry—me?"

"I do! I do! I do not desire anything so much in this world!"

"Well, then," said Alice practically, "sit down and tell me all about it."

She was at ease now, and knowing David, felt sure that he must be magnifying some scruple. She had become, by force of circumstances, the practical one of the two. She set a chair for him at a sufficient distance from her little chintz-covered sofa and opened negotiations. She did not believe in misunderstandings, this wage-earning little schoolmistress with the calm face and the heart that beat like a bird's.

"Now then, David, what is it?"

David Alix groaned in spirit. But he obeyed.

"My mother," he began with difficulty—"my mother——"

Alice nodded encouragingly, as one who would say, "Yes, yes, that I foresaw long ago." But within her heart she was saying, "I was right—it is his mother, after all. He is afraid of her and dares not tell me."

"My mother took some papers from one of your desks in your absence."

He paused, overcome by the hopelessness of the task which had been laid upon him. If only he had denied loving Alice. But then, that on the other hand would have been more impossible still.

"My mother opened an old desk in your house—I cannot excuse her—I only state the fact, but she found —I must tell you——"

"Love-letters!" cried Alice; "yes, I know, a whole pile of them. David, you great stupid! Why, they were not written to me—they were my mother's, written to her by my father before they were married! She was Alice too, you know."

And with a quick daring which became her, she laid a hand on his shoulder, reaching up, and giving him a little pat at each word.

"Jealous! Jealous! Jealous!" she said, and laughed tauntingly.

"No!" said David, answering dully. (How could he ever tell her?)

Alice Brante's laugh rang more clearly than ever, straight from her gladsome young innocent heart, that neither knew nor feared any evil.

"Then the papers your mother took must have been some of my old certificates from college—perhaps I shall not be able to teach any more if she has burned them!"

And she looked at him with a quick arch glance to catch his answering smile. But his face remained dark and troubled. In the kind of still, unmodulated tone which the French call a "white voice," he began

to relate the discovery of his mother. Point by point Alice followed, at first with scorn, then with interest, lastly with wonder.

"Oh, that old roll with the seals you sent me, after going over your father's papers! I tossed them in there, because it said outside, 'Not to be opened'—till some far-off time or other—so why, I thought no more about it. I had other things to do, with the children all day, their blotted exercises to correct, their copies to set, and worse than all, the chance of you coming across the *bassins* for supper. Oh, it is a pity that one can see so far from this window! David, David—the time I have wasted looking for you stalking out of the hollow yonder towards Pierre-à-Feu, or in Simon's boat crossing the lake—I must have stolen months and years from the Government!"

"But, Alice, you do not yet understand," said David; "all my mother has, all that was to be my sister's, is yours."

"Then it is yours, David," she cried, running to him, "and you can give it back to your mother and Noélie! There!"

"Alice," he said sadly, "please think of it seriously. My mother has done wrong and she insists on giving up everything."

"Well," cried Alice, laughing, "that is no reason why she should have all the nobility and renunciation to herself. I will take you, David, and she can have all the rest!"

Few men could have resisted this, and happily David did not. There and then he kissed the little

schoolmistress, so that she had to put him back severely into his place, reminding him of her unprotected state, and the rules of the Government framed on the wall above his head, for the good ordering of primary schools. He laughed and said, "Alice, will you take nothing seriously?"

"Not to-day!" she said, dancing about joyously. "I wish I had a skipping-rope. Oh, David, I am so glad. I would teach you. We would do it together. Let's! I think I can find one!"

David protested feebly, but Alice laughed him down.

"We love each other—we are always going to keep on—God has given us to one another to-day. I don't care a button for old châteaux and properties. Why should I? We shall be one family, and make everybody as happy as they will let us, just as you always have done, David. But in the meantime I am going to teach you to skip in double harness. Now one, two, three—begin!"

And this is the reason of the disgraceful scene which the Cantonal Inspector of Primary Schools beheld through the open door of the schoolhouse. He had been looking forward all day to his surprise visit to Les Bassettes, and doubtless he was a little upset.

"What—what—what is this?" he demanded, summoning the small remnant of dignity that was in him after his stiff climb up out of the valley.

"I am not a schoolmistress any more," said Alice, smiling up at him with the skipping-rope in her hands. "I am sending in my resignation. You see, I am

teaching my husband to go in double harness. Will you take my letter to the Educational Council?"

"No," said the inspector gloomily, "better send it by post!"

And without greeting or farewell, he turned on his heel and strode away back to Brenets to pass a solitary evening at the inn.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BLACK LEO'S WAYGOING

IN spite however, of the bright sweetness of Alice Brante, and the supplications of Noélie, Madame David the Elder would accept of nothing whatever beyond her jointure as the widow of the late Pastor David Alix of Le Lochle. She consented, nevertheless, to inhabit the ancient Pastor House to which she had come as a bride. But she let it be clearly understood that she did this only that the place and grounds might not fall to rack and ruin.

The double marriage-day was in late September. There had been a slight frost in the night which gave a sting to the air, and seemed likely to keep the wind fresh even at noonday. David, being restless, had risen early and climbed the Pic Chaumont immediately behind the house. It was yet an hour from sunrise as he stood on the summit and looked across the level cloud-floor which hid all Neuchâtel and Canton Berne to the giant Oberland peaks, that glimmered like frosted silver through pearly mist—Wetterhorn, Eiger, and Jungfrau were all that he could be sure of.

As David stood waiting for the sun to rise over the

blue ridges flecked with white to the east, an owl hooted behind him. He turned, and out of the shadow of a boulder rose the rugged form of the outlaw of Pierre-à-Feu.

David greeted him warmly, and the outlaw grunted, without, however, going through the formality of shaking hands.

"You are to be wedded to-day," he asked abruptly, "to the schoolmistress at Jean Heller's?"

David nodded, and added that his sister Noélie was also to be married at the same time.

"To the German War Pastor—yes, I have heard," said the outlaw. "I do not love the Germans. But he is a man and I am another. If we met we might fall out. I shall therefore go elsewhere. There is room for a man of my breed over Maloja way—where Austria, Italy, and your little Republic run into a point, and the woods are full of game and the mountains alive with chamois."

"Hermann Falk is a minister of the Word," said David, "and will quarrel with no man. Besides, Noélie and he are not likely to be often in the Jura. He is leaving his work in Germany for her sake, and most likely they will settle in Geneva."

"No matter," said the outlaw; "after a while this country will become too peaceful for me. The gendarmes have overmuch on their hands just now to trouble with Black Leo of the wilderness. But by-and-by, when the Germans have gone and the freebooters of the plains are all laid by the heels, they will bethink them of the man of Pierre-à-Feu. I came out to say farewell."

He held out his hand now, a great weatherbeaten paw, yet kept with wonderful neatness for such a man, the nails clean and fine, and the bands of ragged shirt that showed at neck and sleeve white as water could make them.

"Can I do anything?" said David; "you and I have been pretty good friends!"

"Aye," the outlaw agreed, with a squeeze that made David's thin fingers crack. "I have had none other friend in the country. You have been the good shepherd of a bad sheep. But I am grateful, and if by any means I am saved from the pit, it will be your doing, Pastor David!"

"Is there anything that I can do?" said David again—"tell me."

"Three," answered the outlaw. "First of all, will you pray with me for the last time? You have prayed often, and I—have heard as the stone hears——"

"I was not addressing you!" interrupted David sharply, "but One who neither slumbers nor sleeps!"

"True," said the outlaw, "I stand rebuked!"

"Not so," said David, "I but recalled the fact to your memory. But what else?"

"Let us pray our prayer first," said the outlaw. And on the mountain top, looking across at the great peaks upon which the clouds were drawn close like a coverlet of wool, they knelt and prayed, David's hand resting on the shoulder of his strange parishioner.

Then they rose and with one impulse shook hands almost fraternally.

And as they did so the sun rose and sent a sudden

glory over the ocean of mist, which became as a great sea of glass mingled with fire. The faces of the men glowed as though they too had found, on that Jura top, a true mount of transfiguration.

And the next moment the sun's heat began to draw the mists upward out of the valleys towards the mountain tops.

"You have something else to ask of me?" David suggested softly, still holding the outlaw by the hand, unwilling that the impression should pass; "whatever it is I will do it, for though I am not in all your secrets, I know that many times I must have owed my life to your watchfulness."

"I thank you for that word," said Black Leo. "I am leaving my son behind me. He has the instinct of good, though he has been bred wildly enough. I came of a godly house of burghers, but Ishmael was in my veins. Will you see that *he* has a chance of honest work?"

"Count upon me," said David. "And the other request?"

By this time the mist was rising freely, passing France-wards over the crests of the Jura with a thin, continual, hissing noise. In a few moments more they would be in cloudland. It was then that the outlaw made his last request.

"When you pass the second ravine to the right on your way to Château Villars—it is called the Gorge of Logemont—and before you begin to ascend, just at the place where the bank has caved in, kneel down and say a prayer that the sins of Black Leo, once of Pierre-à-Feu, may be forgiven him."

And in three strides he was lost in the thickening pour of the chill white mist.

It was no easy task for any one to find his way down a mountain drowned in fog, as was now the whole Brenets range of the Jura. Even David, though he knew the hills like his New Testament, kept too far to the left, and came out at the farm of Les Bassettes. Indeed, he narrowly missed running against Jean, who was already in holiday attire, with the man-like determination not to be troubled changing his clothes twice in one day. David was compelled, for fear of ridicule, to put his pride of pastor and of bride-groom in his pocket and hide behind a wall till Jean strode away in the direction of the rocks from which the goats licked the salt. Then, rising from his hiding-place, David skulked past the end of the schoolhouse, deserted to-day, for it was high holiday for the little folk till they should meet at the church at twelve of the clock to walk in the wedding procession of their friend.

David quieted his conscience by the thought that after all it was needful for him to find out if the little schoolmistress had indeed survived the night and would be ready in time. A wave of awful fear came over him lest by any mischance Noélie and the Chaplain should stand up together, and he in his place beside them, but with no bride from the schoolhouse above the Bay of Lilies.

From this fear he was presently delivered by the voice of Anna Heller, who from the open window of Alice's bedroom, spoke of things strange to David Alix—of "seam and gusset and band," of the hanging

of skirts, of broidering, and falls of lace—all in a muffled, semi-sepulchral voice which afforded him ground for fresh terrors till he heard the fresh peal of Alice Brante's laughter, and the words, "Madame Anna, if you do not take those pins out of your mouth, you will certainly swallow half-a-dozen of them!"

After that, there was nothing left for him but to steal away in the direction of Château Villars, where with the Chaplain he passed the time in the orchard. For the first time in the history of their friendship, these two found nothing to say to each other.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"AND THERE WAS LIGHT!"

IN general, it was a pleasant place to sit and wait, that little Protestant church at Brenets. But that day David and the Military Chaplain cared little for the emerald lake lying below, the scattered white houses with their rusty red roofs peeping out of the green of gardens, or the roaring sough of the distant Fall of the Doubs. David was unhappy because he feared that some misfortune would occur at the last moment, and the Military Chaplain because he could not smoke. They were seated on a knoll in front of the chapel. Through the open door they could see the interior. Inside there were many flowers, and the children of Brenets were even then bringing more, for was not this a whole holiday, since their own schoolmistress was to be first witness to little Alice Brante on her wedding-day.

Inside many people were already assembled, and a red cord with many tassels was stretched across the aisle, half-way up, to reserve a space in front for the bridal parties when they should arrive.

"And there was Light!"

Outside David was a prey to shifting panics. The officiating minister from Besançon had not arrived, though there were news of him having been seen crossing the *bassins* in the boat of Simon the fisherman. In spite of this, however, David became so nervous that at last, to quiet him, Hermann Falk commanded him to come and sit down, or else he would be compelled to ask for help to hold him down.

"Suppose your parson does not come," he argued with admirable force, "well, what then?"

"What then?" repeated David, pale and distraught.

"Well," said the Military Chaplain, with calm philosophy, "have you considered that we are both of us duly ordained ministers, and that in case of need I can marry you and you can marry me? Let your Besançon man stay away if he likes. It comes to the same thing!"

However, there was no need for such mutual assistance in extremities. The pastor from Besançon duly arrived, and was taken off by David to be refreshed at the house of one of his parishioners in the chalets above the lake.

The Military Chaplain, still privileged on account of his wound, did not accompany them. He smiled as David marched off with his comrade.

"There goes a poor man," he murmured, "who in the matter of meat and drink will fare but indifferently this morning. We must see to it that he gets his dinner afterwards."

And, as a matter of fact, David, by dint of continual

fidgeting, looking over his shoulder, and running to the door of the hospitable chalet, succeeded in shortening the visitor's appetite, so that they were back at the little knoll by the chapel in five minutes. Happily it now behoved them to show a little more dignity, and the Military Chaplain had to assert himself.

"Quiet, David, quiet! Steady in the ranks! Man, one would think you had never commanded in an action like this. Have you never been at a wedding before?"

"Oh, often," said David simply, "but—this is different!"

A remark which caused both the visiting pastor, a stout, burly man, and Hermann Falk, to laugh aloud.

"Why, brother," whispered he of Besançon, "you cannot expect to be married a time or two first so as to get accustomed to the thing by degrees!"

But David Alix heeded neither jibe nor philosophic sympathy. He had no peace till he saw a long rambling train of white descending from the direction of the schoolhouse. Then all at once he became preposterously gay, and even rallied the Military Chaplain that after all he would lose the race.

But the Chaplain was exceedingly calm. He only clapped David on the back and murmured in his ear, "This is a little harder than learning to play skipping-rope, eh, my David?"

Which showed that somebody had been talking.

However, it may be guessed that the real ground of the Chaplain's impassibility was a confidence made by Noélie, whom he had met in the orchard the night before. She had told him that by Madame's orders the ancient *calèche*, long disused, was being furbished up and dressed with flowers to convey the party from Château Villars to the church in due state.

The brides arrived at about the same moment. Noélie was accompanied by Madame David the Elder, whose face was obscured by a thick veil, but she was richly dressed as became the *châtelaine* of a great house, and took upon herself, none questioning her right, to conduct the double procession with great solemnity and distinction.

As Noélie passed into the chapel, where behind the communion table the Besançon pastor stood waiting in gown and bands, she saw David and Hermann waiting. Her troop of farm servants, and what shepherds could be spared from the hills, flocked into the seats reserved for them. La Petite Flore held the bride's train. She, too, was clad in the white of a maid of honour and towered over her principal, as was just and right in an ex-officer of the Laroche corps of *franc-tireurs*. For her cross of the Legion of Honour swung at her breast, the ribbon making a red stain upon the white of her robe.

David stood quivering with anxiety. It was as he feared; she was not coming after all. His eyes had seen only what they desired to see. But the reproachful eyes of the Chaplain, and the awful dignity

of his mother standing behind Noélie, kept him steady in his place.

But there came a murmur from without, the clear chanting of many children's voices, a shout of greeting from the folk who would presently crowd the aisles after all were in their places. They had waited outside for this.

It was the children singing, a quaint tender little song which the little schoolmistress herself had taught them. They bore garlands of white meadow flowers twisted into ropes. And as they raised their hands in the air in time to the rhythm of the music, the flowery chains were lifted too. Petals showered down upon happy upturned faces, and at the sound of their singing every mother's eyes (and some others) were wet with tears. They divided to right and left as they came to the front. The little schoolmistress passed through with her comrade of Brenets walking behind her. Then the white-clad, flower-laden mites formed a close and rustling cordon as the minister bade those persons desiring to be united in the bonds of holy matrimony to join their hands.

* * * * *

This is, strictly speaking, the end. But there are certain matters to be set right. First of all, there is Madame David, now of due and just title to be called "the Elder," because at Château Villars there abides Madame David the Younger, whom we have known as "the little schoolmistress."

Even at the wedding there had lurked in the bosom of the elder woman a sense of having been supplanted, dull and bitter. But time, the true all-heal, and the

tender affection of the two homes she had helped to set up, gradually cured the wounds of that haughty spirit. More even than love, to the stern old woman, was the knowledge that she had made reparation, resisted temptation, and, as she put it, "gone out from Château Villars even as she had come in." This was balm to her sick and lonely soul. She had stood on her strict right. All the petitions of her children could not alter her firm mind. She would receive only what was left her by the will of her first husband. She would take up her abode neither with Noélie and Hermann at Geneva, nor would she remain at Château Villars with David and Alice. She even desired that the house should no longer be called by that name. Château Alix was her choice. But to this David strongly objected, and suggested (vainly, of course) that it ought to be named Château Alice. Last of all, the old name was reverted to as a compromise, and the great house overlooking the *bassins* and the white houses of Brenets became once more Château Chaumont.

So from that day little Alice, the schoolmistress of Les Bassettes, became its *châtelaine*, and wore the keys with a certain demure dignity, yet ruling David with such an absolute rule as his mother had never dreamed of. The clouds of war rolled away. Peace came. The burned farms were rebuilt, and though the women of all French households still wore mourning like a livery, the country put on its smiling face. The grapes clustered on the vines among which the dead had lain, and the husbandman was heard again sharpening his scythe

in the river meadows where bayonets had so lately gleamed.

Noélie and Hermann dwelt at Geneva, where the Military Chaplain soon found congenial work in the University. Hermann would not allow his wife to receive any portion of the money which had been rightfully proved to belong to the little schoolmistress. She took only, at the urgent request of David and Alice, the furniture of the room which had been her own since childhood and from which she had escaped to go to the bedside of Ludovic Villars.

It was, therefore, impossible for Noélie to keep her promise in person to her dead brother, or to clear the good name of her father, the banker of St. Gabriel. But after a while her excellent Hermann went on pilgrimage to Provence, leaving her alone. He did nothing in the little town for a few days, only looked and listened, putting a question now and then. When taken to task about his strong German accent, he produced his Swiss passport and his voting-card as a Genevan citizen.

Finally, he sought out the shrewdest lawyer in the town, and by his assistance settled all claims in a plain, business-like manner. The local papers contained the notice that the stigma of bankruptcy had been officially lifted from the name of Henri Villars, once a well-known citizen of the department. It was added that this had been brought about by the honourable action of the dead man's relatives who, being foreign subjects, were under no necessity to assume his debts.

"And there was Light!"

In June of each year the whole family unites at Château Chaumont, though mostly at the last moment Madame David the Elder writes from the Pastor House at Lochle to bid them visit her instead. If her children wish to see a cross old woman they must e'en shake their shanks and come to see her, but she warns them that she can only take two or three at a time, as she will not have Elise, her little maid, put upon. Moreover, her poor folk cannot let her go even for a week.

Indeed, she keeps the whole neighbourhood bright with good works. Each year she becomes more and more wedded to her ancient Pastor House, with the vine over the porch which her husband planted.

Chiefly she is happy because Madame David Alix the Elder (she has forgotten that ever she was called by the name of Villars) has succeeded in building up another fabric of that consideration which is dearer to her than anything on earth.

Only into her husband's study she does not enter. For as she gets older and frailer, the vision comes to her more and more clearly. She began by pretending, but now she believes. *He* is in there, her true husband, busy at his sermon, and she must not disturb him.

So, not unhappily nor at all discontentedly, Madame David the Elder awaits the common fate, the husband of her youth coming closer to her every day, and the light from the Unseen beginning to play about her soul.

Jean and Anna Heller still hold their possessions

in a hale and hearty age, and since their first Alice is provided for, they have now resolved to keep them as a dower for a second Alice—the living image, so they say, of the little schoolmistress. The school itself has been moved down to the lake shore, but Jean bought the cottage. And there, in that very room, this true history of dark days has been written.

The outlaw of Pierre-à-Feu disappeared utterly, no man knows whither—least of all his son, who, from an imp apt at running messages and finding trails, has developed into our respected rural postman, who, as a matter of fact, will carry this manuscript, as soon as it is copied out fair, down to the bank agency at Brenets, whence (as a *declarée valeur*) it will find its way to a certain printing-house near Temple Bar. *Finis coronat opus.*

Hermann is now a principal of the School of Theology at Geneva, and with his beard and pipe, fully looks the part—that is, till you hear him laugh, or come upon him rioting with his children in the shrubbery, for all the world, as his wife avers, like a great two-legged bear. La Grande Flore died in her daughter's house at Vercel-Adam. La Petite still handles the defacing-stamp and sealing-wax, secure in her renown of ancient valour, and decorated, as is fitting, with the cross of the Legion of Honour won upon fields of battle.

And David? Our dear simple Pastor is as of old —no hireling. His parish remains the same. His people worship him still, and as the grey hairs gather more thickly about his temples on either side,

they love him the better. Never a very clever man, never a great orator, never likely to sit among the mighty of the earth, he has grown with the years more gentle and sweet in nature, a winner of souls, and therefore wise, a friend of the poor and therefore rich in the kingdom. He has, in spite of his wife's château, no more of the goods of this world than he ever had.

The little schoolmistress administers for him. She serves him out each morning the silver and copper for his pockets, one metal in the left and the other in the right. And he never returns home with a single *sou vaillant* upon his person. And here we leave them. We can no better.

However, for our comfort, let us take one more glimpse at our two favourites. They are at their own door. Over their heads the blue firmament arches crystalline. It bends across from purple France to the smooth green ridges of the Jura. Beneath the floor of this God's temple is spread out tilth and meadow and vineyard. The *bassins* are the links in a chain greener than emeralds.

David and the little schoolmistress are setting out for church this still sunshiny Sabbath morning. Listen how sedately the children chatter behind their elders, who come marching down the path arm in arm.

The present historian watches them go. For he has the farewell word to find, which shall express the keynote of these humble, simple lives.

Long before the returning children break in upon him with the noisy delight of freedom, the word has

been found. In it there is nothing of new. It was long ago used concerning David, the quiet pastor of souls, by his warlike Jonathan, the Army Chaplain. It is just this: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.'

THE END

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED.